

PREACHING WOMEN MATTER: OVERCOMING PATRIARCHY AND
ESTABLISHING MODELS THAT AFFIRM PREACHING WOMEN
IN SOUTHEAST ALEXANDRIA LOUISIANA AND BEYOND

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ABSTRACT

PREACHING WOMEN MATTER: OVERCOMING PATRIARCHY AND ESTABLISHING MODELS THAT AFFIRM PREACHING WOMEN IN SOUTHEAST ALEXANDRIA LOUISIANA AND BEYOND

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Patriarchy prohibits women from fully accepting their call to preach in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana. Women are often ignored, rejected, or shunned when they announce their call to preach. The hypothesis statement is if participants engage in a six-week training program that empowers women to speak up for themselves, then they will recognize patriarchal systems and practices that silence the voices of women called to preach and discover models to circumvent those obstacles. A qualitative analysis of pre- and post-surveys, personal journals and individual interviews indicates participants were able to identify patriarchy and are now equipped to navigate it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I thank my amazing God for the opportunity to successfully begin and end this journey. Secondly, I extend honor to my ancestors, parents, brothers, and extended family members, who are my greatest cheerleaders and who continually push me to victory. I also honor my countless faith communities, specifically St. Matthew Baptist Church of Boyce and the Healing Place Ministries of Alexandria, Louisiana. I do not have adequate words to properly thank my preaching sisters, who heard my many cries without condemnation but always reminding me of my Who and my Why.

To my mentor, Dr. Lee E. Fields Jr., I am forever grateful for your guidance and support. You never wavered in your commitment to get me to the finish line. Thank you, Dr. Cathy Johns, my faculty consultant who began this journey with me. Your words of encouragement and calming voice brought clarity when I needed it the most. To my professional associates, Dr. Mary W. Moss, Dr. Jamie Eaddy Chism, Dr. Irie Lynne Session, Dr. Cassandra Gould, and Dr. Karen B. Johnson, I am forever indebted to you for your willingness to offer your encouragement, experiences, and expertise. Thank you to my contextual associates, particularly Wanda Gilmore and La'Keitha Bell, for your commitment in helping me to bring my final project into fruition. Thank you to all my research participants for without you this work would be in vain.

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enough words to adequately express gratitude to my peer associate, Garland S. Thompson. We promised each other that just as we started this journey together, we would end it together. You are my brother indeed and our bond is unbreakable.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all the women, who are called to preach, but whose voices are silenced by fear, faulty theology, and perceived failures. May you push through the patriarchal systems and practices that seek to forever keep you in the kitchen and the bedroom. May you stand tall in pulpits and brush harbors to loudly proclaim the good news of Jesus, the Great Liberator. Remember, there are more for you than will ever be against you.

ABBREVIATIONS

CPE	Clinical Pastoral Education
GED	General Education Development
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

Your silence will not protect you.

—Audre Lorde, *Sisters Outsiders: Essays and Speeches*

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchal systems and practices silence women and prohibit them from fully accepting their call to the ordained ministry in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana. Women, who have been called to preach, are often ignored, rejected, discriminated against, or shunned when they announce their call to preach or to pastor. This project is the catalyst for a six-week training program designed to raise awareness of systems and practices that hinder women from accepting their call to preach and to provide them with tools to navigate such practices.

Chapter One, Ministry Focus, centers on my own experiences as a preaching woman, whose roots are in the Black Baptist church. The problems that I faced and continue to face are common for women who want to fulfill their God-given preaching assignment. In Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana, there are approximately thirty Black Baptist churches of which all but one are led by men. A cursory examination of videos and photos from worship services within this target area indicate that women are the majority attendees. Yet, men are often the senior leaders, who uphold patriarchal views, systems, and practices that are designed to keep women in subservient roles. Women are prohibited from any churchwide senior leadership positions, including pastor and deacon.

Chapter Two, Biblical Foundations, analyzes Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 14:34 instructing the women to remain silent in the public assembly. This verse is often used to reject women's call to preach. A careful analysis of 1 Corinthians 14:34-40

indicates that Paul was not talking to all women in perpetuity. Therefore, they were disrupting the cultural norms, which Paul views as antithetical to the goal of building up the body of Christ. Paul was not instructing all women to remain silent in public worship. To remain silent would mean that women could not exercise their spiritual gifts of prophecy, which involves uttering words. Instead, he was talking to women, specifically to wives, who were disrupting public worship that brought disgrace to themselves and dishonor to their husbands in Corinth.

Chapter Three, Historical Foundations, provides a historical analysis of autobiographies of nineteenth-century Black women preachers, who also had to navigate their call to preach within systems of oppression. The stories of Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julie J. Foote are common to women in the twenty-first century. They are the stories of many women who are called to preach but rejected because of systems of oppression and patriarchy within churches and denominations that were ironically birthed to flee oppression. Lee, Elaw, and Foote provide models of how to remain faithful to God amid systems and practices that are designed to oppress rather than liberate.

Chapter Four, Theological Foundations, explores Womanist Theology, which centers on Black women and gives them a voice. Womanist Theology validates the concerns and experiences of Black women, who everyday face patriarchal systems and practices as they seek to fulfill their God-ordained call as preaching women. Womanist Theology gives voice to Black women, who are often limited in what they can say, what they can do, and where they can exist. Womanist Theology is akin to being Jesus incarnate as this theology seeks to bring the good news to all people and not just to a select few. Jesus as a model shows what it means to not allow male privileges to lord

over women but to see them not only as ones who need a Savior but as ones who can bring salvation to others. For example, Jesus, as a male in first century Palestine, embraced women as ministry partners rather than subordinates. He does so when he chooses to appear as the risen Savior to the women, who I believe are the first proclaimers of resurrected Jesus.

Chapter Five, *Interdisciplinary Foundations*, targets sociology and its associated theories to explore how humans relate to each other in society's institutions and how religious institutions mimic secular institutions regarding power dynamics and gender. Of special interest is Karl Marx's Social Conflict Theory, which assumes that conflict is perpetual, structural inequalities exist, and changes come when the oppressed revolt against the systems and practices that seek to keep them in their places. Marx contends that conflict is inevitable and perpetual as the powerful elite fights hard to maintain control while the oppressed fights to free themselves. Perhaps those who oppose women's call to preach in the name of Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 14:34 has more to do with power rather than theology. Perhaps, it is a means to keep women in their places for fear of losing control.

Chapter Six, the final chapter, presents the Project Analysis, which interpreted data captured during the six-week training program with seven Black women, three of which attend Black Baptist churches in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana. The chapter includes the following: 1) the methodology, which capsulates the tools used to capture data; 2) means of implementation, which provides how the project was structured, demographics of participants, and expertise of presenters; 3) summary of learning, which

provides evidence of the project bearing out the hypothesis; and 4) the conclusion, which details the next steps based upon this research.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

Recently, I watched a Netflix documentary entitled *Found*. It tells the story of three Chinese girls that families adopted in America after being abandoned in China. Due to China's one-child policy implemented between 1980 and 2015,¹ parents had to abandon additional children or face a steep fine for failing to apply. The policy mandated that if a family already had one child, a girl, the family could have another child in hopes of having a son. "This policy led to sex-selective abortions or infanticide targeting girls because of a centuries-old social preference for boys."²

In the documentary, Chinese parents abandoned their daughters in a crowded public space hoping someone would find and care for these children. Each of the three girls spoke of her desire to connect with her family origin. She had a desire to know whether her family loved her and thought about her. With the help of a local woman who specialized in connecting abandoned girls with their Chinese families, the girls traveled

¹ Andrew Mullen, "China's One Child Policy: What Was It and What Impact Did It Have?" China's Macro Economy, June 1, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3135510/chinas-one-child-policy-what-was-it-and-what-impact-did-it>.

² Mullen, "China's One Child Policy: What Was It and What Impact Did It Have?"

to China along with their adoptive parents. One girl found her family through DNA tests and pondered over whether she was ready to meet them.

Throughout this documentary, I kept thinking how cruel a society must be to develop policies to diminish and dehumanize girls. Had I been born in China as my family's first child, a girl, my family would have faced this decision. Knowing my parents' financial status at the time of my birth, I no doubt would have been among the baby girls discarded in a public crowded space. However, that was not my lot. Still, I cried as I thought about my birth and the excitement that permeated throughout both my maternal and paternal families. I could hardly imagine being abandoned or not wanted. There was nothing that my family members would not do to ensure that I had the best of everything.

However, much like girls in China, in many ways, girls throughout the world, including Southeast Alexandria, are treated as second-class citizens with rules that dictate how they are to show up in the world. Growing up in Hammond, Louisiana, I faced some rules that dictated what I could and could not do. The spoken and unspoken policies and procedures suggest that if I did what was expected of girls, I would have an opportunity to succeed. At thirty-eight years old, when I accepted my call to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, I discovered that patriarchy would trump my qualifications and credentials and God's voice. In 2003, I preached my first sermon in Racine, Wisconsin, after years of denying the call because of what I believe to be fear, flawed traditions, and faulty theology. Almost twenty years later, each day I encounter women who cannot move forward in their preaching call because of rejection by their church's leadership, which

maintains that women should not preach or lead the church in a senior leadership position that is restricted for men only.

The goal of this paper is to identify the seamless connection between my ministerial journey, personal experiences, and the context I currently serve. This intersection between the three became apparent after reviewing my journey and critically examining the context. The common thread is the conduit that catalyzes a ministry project carefully designed and implemented to address a specific need in the identified in the context. Research, observations, and experiences indicate that the stated need is not limited to Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana; therefore, the project will be designed as a model that may be expanded and emulated in similar contexts beyond the original context.

Context

In 2004, one year after preaching my first sermon at Zoe Outreach Ministries in Racine, Wisconsin, I moved to Alexandria, Louisiana, to become the first Black top newsroom manager. I moved with much angst and anxiety because of the perceived perils and rejection I would face as a woman who preaches. My feelings were not without merit as there were more than thirty Black Baptist churches in the city, and all of them were headed by Black men, many of whom did not embrace women preachers.

Almost twenty years later, I can now admit my coming to Alexandria was a God-ordained move. Indeed, I would not move to the city as a Baptist preaching woman if not for God. Moving to Alexandria as a preaching woman with no local connections made my journey in this environment even more difficult. Additionally, Louisiana Christian

University, which aligns with the Louisiana Baptist Convention of the Southern Baptist Convention,³ is located within walking distance of downtown Alexandria. Many local preachers receive their theological training from this school. The small private Baptist college has hosted many Republican presidents and political candidates.

The religious landscape of Alexandria is multifaceted as the city is the home to three significant denominations' state headquarters. The three are Louisiana Baptist, affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention; Pentecostals of Alexandria, affiliated with the United Pentecostal Church; and the Louisiana Assembly of God, affiliated with the national Assemblies of God. Additionally, there are sprinklings of other denominations, namely Apostolic, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Roman Catholic. Regarding Baptists in Louisiana, most whites are affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, and Black Baptists are divided between the National Baptist Convention of America and the National Baptist Convention of USA. In many instances, the Pentecostals and Southern Baptists are the primary influencers in every facet of city life. For example, Southern Baptists for years were vocal against the sale of alcohol within the city limits of Pineville, which was dry until 2018, when voters passed a law allowing the sale of alcohol.⁴

In many towns and cities in the United States, there appear to be a heavy concentration of churches, payday lending institutions, convenience stores, funeral homes, and beauty supply stores in predominately Black communities. Certainly, Alexandria is no exception, especially when it comes to many Baptist churches. This is

³ Louisiana Christian University, "History," <https://lacollege.edu/about/meet-lc/history/>.

⁴ Baptist Message, "Vote No on Alcohol Sales in Pineville," November 29, 2019, <https://www.baptistmessage.com/vote-no-on-alcohol-sales-in-pineville/>.

evident by the numerous Black Baptist churches in Southeast Alexandria, where many predominately Black residents live. There are churches within walking distance of each other. There are churches as backdoor neighbors, and there are churches as front door neighbors. Many of the names of these churches include the words "First," "Second," "Greater," or "New." Through personal investigation and through conversations, I discovered that many of these churches split due to leadership discontent. I have counted more than thirty Black Baptist churches in Southeast Alexandria. While riding through many of these neighborhoods, I noticed that men lead all these churches. There is only one Black Baptist church in Southeast Alexandria with a woman as the lead pastor. However, there is a female pastor at a United Methodist Church and one at an Apostolic church. It is interesting to note that in 1978, a woman founded and pastored an Apostolic church in Southeast Alexandria. She had been a member of a prominent Baptist church for fifty years before starting her church. Under her leadership, she grew the church from thirty to 250. She died in 2004, leaving the church to her then seventeen-year-old grandson to lead the congregation.⁵

According to 2019 U.S. Census data, there are approximately 46,180 residents in Alexandria. Of that number, 55.3 percent are Black, 51.5 percent are female, and 48.5 percent are male. Southeast Alexandria has two major census tracts comprised of more than an estimated 95 percent Black residents, and those residents are primarily female. Other ethnicities in the city of Alexandria are American Indian, 0.7 percent; Asian, 2.1

⁵ Thaddeus Sands, interview by Sherri L. Jackson, Love Fellowship Christian Church, Alexandria, LA, October 1, 2021.

percent; and Hispanic, 2.4 percent.⁶ There is a heavy concentration of veterans in Alexandria, once the home of England Air Force Base and the city's proximity to Fort Polk Army Base. England Air Force Base closed in 1992 following a military realignment. The city is among a few municipalities that have successfully transitioned the military base to England Airpark, including the Alexandria International Airport.⁷

The median household income⁸ is \$43,497, with 24.4 percent of the population living in poverty. Of the workforce, 54.7 percent are women. Retail, food service, and healthcare comprise the most significant portion of the city's economy.

Meanwhile, about 6,500 residents in Districts 2 and 3 are more than 90 percent Black, 5.6 percent white, and 0.4 percent Hispanic. The average household income is \$33,631.⁹ Interestingly, 40.4 percent of the adults have never married, meaning they are single. More than 50 percent of those identified as single in these areas are female.¹⁰ Less than half of Districts 2 and 3 have a high school diploma or GED, with 22 percent having some high school education.¹¹

On any given Sunday, churches are filled with mostly women and children. According to a study, "Gender Distribution of U.S. Religious Groups in 2017, by faith

⁶ United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: Alexandria City, Louisiana, 2019" <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/alexandriacitylouisiana/PST045219>.

⁷ Air Force Civil Engineer Center, "Former England Air Force Base, La.," <https://www.afcec.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/466138/former-england-air-force-base-la>.

⁸ United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: Alexandria City, Louisiana, 2019."

⁹ United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: Alexandria City, Louisiana, 2019."

¹⁰ United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: Alexandria City, Louisiana, 2019."

¹¹ United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: Alexandria City, Louisiana, 2019."

traditions,"¹² of Black Protestants, 58 percent are women, and 42 percent are men. A cursory examination of Sunday morning church attendees in Southeast Alexandria bears these statistics, which would lead one to assert that women are among the biggest donors and supporters of Black Baptist churches. However, their return on investment is not evident in leadership or programs dedicated to the plight of Black women, many of whom are single mothers. Keri Day, in her book *Unfinished Business: Black Women, The Black Church and the Struggle to Thrive in America*, asserts the following:

The well-being of many poor black women is intimately related to the black churches. First, black women, historically and now, constitute the majority of black church members and are presently the most devoted supporters of such churches (as is generally true of American Protestant churches).¹³

Based on my personal experiences, Black church women have been the target of pulpit jokes, body shaming, domestic violence, and sexual misuse or abuse. Not having women in pastoral leadership positions or on ministerial staff results in few advocating on their behalf.

Still, despite the oppression many Black women face in the church, Black women tend to be more religious than Black men. Stacey Floyd-Thomas, an associate professor of ethics and society at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, posits that perhaps women are more religious because of the oppression. She argues:

Black women have been the most mistreated and scandalized in U.S. society and culture as they wrestle both individually and collectively with the triple jeopardy of racism, sexism, and classism. If that is the case – and I believe it is – it is no wonder that black women, due to their experience

¹² Statista, “Gender distribution of U.S. religious groups 2017, by faith traditions,” <https://www.statista.com/statistics/245542/gender-distribution-of-us-religious-groups-by-faith-tradition/>.

¹³ Keri Day, *Unfinished Business: Black Women, The Black Church and the Struggle to Thrive in America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 15.

of sexism, would seek out their faith as a way of finding relief, reprieve, resolution, and redemption.¹⁴

Often slave masters used the Bible to justify slavery using Ephesians 6:5-6:

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”¹⁵ In many ways, some Black male pastors use the Bible to justify their patriarchal views and mistreatment of Black women who sit in their pews. Pastors who are the most vocal about the systemic oppression of Blacks are themselves equally oppressive of women. For example, in a sermon dated November 13, 2021, Burnett Robinson, a New York City pastor stated:

In this matter of submission, I want you to know upfront, ladies, that once you get married, you are no longer your own. You are your husband's. You understand what I'm saying? I emphasize that because I saw in court the other day on television where a lady sued her husband for rape. And I would say to you gentlemen, the best person to rape is your way. But then it has become legalized.¹⁶

The pastor justified his statements based upon the biblical text Eph. 5:22, which states, “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.”¹⁷ Consequently, on November 24, 2021, the Greater New York Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church removed Burnett Robinson from his duties as minister because of his comments

¹⁴ Theola Labbe-DeBose, “Black women are among country's most religious groups,” *Washington Post*, July 6, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/black-women-are-among-countrys-most-religious-groups/2012/07/06/gJQA0BksSW_story.html.

¹⁵ Ephesians 6:5-6, NRSV, unless noted otherwise, all bible citations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

¹⁶ Yonat Shimron, “‘The best person to rape is your wife,’ says Bronx pastor,” *Religious News Service*, November 22, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/11/22/the-best-person-to-rape-is-your-wife-says-bronx-pastor/?fbclid=IwAR0OURZF5nHHjZ3Tjgd4SFA1Tq7hOnu8gOfsgdPHWIYV2LEUjoY6QUkjFg>.

¹⁷ Ephesians 5:22.

on men having the right to rape their wives. In a prepared statement, the Conference wrote the following:

The Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists recognizes many have been deeply harmed by the sentiments expressed by Robinson. The views he expressed are wrong and not accepted by our church. Rape and sexual assault of women are crimes and should always be treated as such. We will continue to educate and counsel all pastors, seminary students, and staff to fully understand that this type of rhetoric is abhorrent and unequivocally unacceptable.¹⁸

When confronted with such pastors, I offer them the following scenario: Imagine you are invited to a white Southern Baptist church to preach, and the pastor greeted you at the door. Because you are a preacher, you expect to sit in the pulpit. Instead, the pastor leads you to the front pew and tells you that you will be speaking from the podium on the floor because you are Black. What do you do as a Black male preacher?

The described scenario happens to Black women preachers in some Black Baptist churches in Alexandria, specifically Southeast Alexandria. Male preachers would scream racism, stage rallies, and call civil rights organizations and attorneys to file discrimination lawsuits. Unlike male preachers, there are no avenues for preaching women to protest or resist such practices. The mantra "oppressed people oppress people" holds for Black male pastors who oppress Black preaching women in the name of God, Christianity, the church, and the Bible. Once I spoke at a Black Baptist church in this target area and was directed to sit on the front row. The pastor stood on the edge of the pulpit in a manner to block me from coming into the pulpit. However, as a form of resistance, I did not sit on

¹⁸ Yonat Shimron, "Pastor who approved of marital rape removed from Seventh-day Adventist Church," Religion News Service, November 24, 2021, https://religionnews.com/2021/11/24/pastor-who-approved-of-marital-rape-removed-from-seventh-day-adventist-church/?fbclid=IwAR1QeP0_z8BNfMK_ydkaM6Mbkv32JwJ07HVC_xGtb1ZxOwEzLqlix_gnf4g.

the front row. Instead, I walked to the fourth row and sat with my friends who came to support me. I did this to maintain my dignity and power as an ordained preacher. Another way that patriarchal systems and practices showed up in this church is the honorarium I received. To my frustration, anger, and dismay, I received a framed photo of myself. Following this incident, I decided that I would never preach from a floor podium if males were sitting in the pulpit. Secondly, when asked to speak, I now always talk about compensation before accepting the engagement.

Of course, church women are socialized not to talk about money or being paid their worth. We are taught to gladly take whatever is given with the caveat that we should never forget that we are "working for the Lord" and not expect to be monetarily compensated. However, these same women use their sometimes-limited resources to purchase food for chicken dinner sales with proceeds being used to pay male preachers. It is a religious form of taxation without representation.

Sadly, as many Blacks who side with their white oppressors are called "Uncle Toms," there are some women who take up the mantle of pastors who use their authority to reject the preaching call of women. It is not uncommon to hear women congregants declare, "Women are not called to preach. They can be missionaries or evangelists." When asked why women cannot preach, the answer is often "my pastor says the Bible forbids it." Often, some pastors throw the rock and hide their hands by saying, "there are many women who do not believe in women preachers." My response is usually, "why would they believe in women preachers when all that they hear is male preachers and pastors bashing or opposing women who preach." Here is an example of why some women reject preaching women:

Nearly thirty years ago, I questioned whether or not God could use a woman in the pulpit. Though there were several ordained preachers in the Baptist church that I was an active member of in Atlanta, my belief system was formed by the many male preachers around me who said that women were not called to preach. Though women were excellent teachers in the Baptist church of my origin in Pineville, Louisiana, I was taught that God did not call women to preach.¹⁹

Meanwhile, in my context, I see the following strengths:

- Southeast Alexandria's rich religious landscape provides a plethora of options for those seeking to discover, strengthen or practice a faith tradition of their choosing. Many of these faith communities have offered hope, solace, and comfort for at least 100 years.
- Southeast Alexandria's location, which includes the downtown area, makes it a prime location for hosting state conferences and gatherings, which positively impacts the entire city.
- Southeast Alexandria's strong family ties and social networks bring a sense of cohesiveness and unity. Though there are distinct neighborhoods, the boundaries are seamless as many residents attend the same schools, churches, and social gatherings.

Regarding weaknesses in my context, I see the following:

- Southeast Alexandria's median household income, as stated earlier, is \$33,631. This is below the city's median household income and far below the state's almost

¹⁹ Pamelaia Sanders, interview by Sherri L. Jackson, Pineville, LA, November 25, 2021.

\$51,000.²⁰ A lack of financial resources has a far-reaching impact on everything from a quality of life to obtaining decent, safe, and affordable housing.

- Most leadership within Black Baptist churches in Southeast Louisiana do not reflect the communities' demographics they serve. Instead, they reflect patriarchal views regarding gender roles in the church, the body of Christ. Though statistics stated earlier in this paper suggest more women attend and support religious institutions, the pulpit and church leadership are primarily male. Not only is this a theological malady, but it is also a justice issue.
- Many Southeast Alexandria residents lack exposure outside of Central Louisiana as many attend nearby schools of higher learning or do not see a need to move outside of their communities of origin. This weakness can result in stagnation, traditionalism, and a narrow perspective of life.

Ministry Journey

In 1998, I left my beloved Louisiana to escape my former husband who was addicted to crack cocaine. The move was necessary to restore and sustain me physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, and spiritually. Little did I know that the move would also precipitate a significant, life-altering change in my life. Five years after arriving in Racine, I acknowledged my call to the ministry and preached my first sermon in May 2003. I did not readily accept my call to preach because of my faithfulness to the early theological training I received regarding women in ministry. Until my move to Racine, I

²⁰ Statista, "Median household income in Louisiana from 1990 to 2020," <https://www.statista.com/statistics/205944/median-household-income-in-louisiana/>.

refused to listen to any woman who claimed to be a preacher in any sense of the word.

However, just as the Apostle Paul had been sent to preach to the same people he was trained to persecute, God called me to preach and face many of the same people who had taught me to persecute female preachers and pastors.

Accepting my call to preach was not an easy one. Not only did I have to deal with others' opinions about women in ministry, but I also had to overcome my own biases regarding women and their roles in the church. However, God's voice became louder and louder as I continually rejected the call. Growing up in my childhood church, GBC, the pastor and congregation pushed students to excel in all their endeavors. They proudly exclaimed, "You can be anything that you want to be in life." I later discovered "anything" did not include me preaching. "Anything" included all those endeavors that fit nicely into prescribed roles for women.

With much fear and trepidation, I answered my call to preach following a dream the night after my pastor preached from Isaiah 6:1,

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.²¹

In my dream, God clearly said, "If you do not say yes, I will remove your Uzziah, specifically your mother." Early the following day, I called my pastor and told him I was ready. The following Sunday, I announced my calling to the church and preached my first sermon within months. Even after I preached my first sermon, it took a long time for me to use the word preach when referring to my speaking engagements.

²¹ Isaiah 6:1.

One year to the date of my first sermon, I returned to Louisiana. I vividly remember asking God, "Why God? You know they do not believe in women preachers down there?" God answered, "Don't worry about anything. You will walk through doors that have been closed to women." God's reassurance did not quell my internal voice and the rejection I would face in Alexandria, Louisiana, and beyond.

I returned to Louisiana to accept a job as the managing editor of the daily newspaper in Alexandria. I firmly believe that my move to Wisconsin was a strategic move of God. The Creator used a marriage that I should never have been in to get me out of Louisiana to a place where I did not have the distractions of familiar people, places, and things. After saying yes to God, it was time to return to Louisiana to do the work I was called to do before the foundation of the world. While God orchestrated the move through the newspaper, it had more to do with where the Creator is leading my life. I remained at the newspaper for eighteen months.

Still not fully understanding the ramifications of my acceptance, it did not take long for some of my longtime Baptist friends and associates to denounce me and, in many ways, discard me. Almost twenty years later, I still have fractured relationships with people that I once held dear. I no longer had a place in the local, state, or national Baptist conventions. Not having those deep connections was indeed hurtful, causing feelings of isolation. Though I have lost many, I have gained many more people, places, and things that have strengthened me as a woman and a preacher.

God's promises have been true because I have preached in pulpits that had been closed to women. Though I am grateful to God for using me in such a powerful way, more and more, I am learning to appreciate the wounds and scars that accompany those

pivotal moments in my preaching ministry. In 2016, I published my memoir, *Not Built to Break*. It chronicles my journey, and it has fostered conversation with women, particularly Black women, who too have struggled with tradition and theology as they seek to obey God's voice.

Theologically, I do not believe that God causes calamities and sufferings, but I firmly believe God will use such to push us to our future. Because of the rejection I faced, I am a great defender of women in ministry. I have devoted the last five years to mentoring and training women struggling to accept their call to preach. The reasons behind that struggle include fear and patriarchy. Many times, women are ignored or rejected by their male pastors, who often use the biblical creation story, along with 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:12 as proof texts to silence women. I firmly believe that pastors use these scriptures out of tradition, poor exegesis of the text, and patriarchy rather than their solid exegetical analysis to conclude the role of women in the church.

Not satisfied with mediocrity, I enrolled in United Theological Seminary in 2012. Through this journey towards a Master of Divinity, God opened my eyes to how I discriminated against any person or any theology that did not line up with my belief system. It did not take long for me to realize that I was doing to others what had been done to me. I was using scriptures to justify my discrimination, specifically towards the LGBTQIA+ community.

During the first day of my Spiritual Formation class, several of my cohort students shared their stories of how they believed that their local church rejected them once they identified as same-gender-loving. Though the circumstances were different in

our stories, many feelings of rejection, isolation, and discrimination were the same. The Holy Spirit impressed upon me that, in many ways, I, as an oppressed preaching woman, became the oppressor of my LGBTQIA+ siblings. In good faith and as a Christian, I could not use the Bible as a weapon to discriminate or cause harm to any of God's children. This experience also gave me a greater appreciation of the necessity to analyze a biblical text carefully. I graduated in 2016 determined to pursue a doctorate.

My work as a trainer and a coach of women in ministry led me to write a book, *Silent Not Me: Reimagining the Biblical Text That Keeps Women Out of the Pulpit*. This book that became a number one bestseller on Amazon takes an exegetical approach to Paul's statement to the church at Corinth. I just firmly believe that when people know better, they do better. In the book, I write the following:

Because of these words, written in a book I accept as a sacred guide for my life, I struggled when God called me to preach. I saw what was on top of the line, but I also was hearing God clearly say, 'You are to preach.' There came a time I had to embrace the God of my understanding and leave behind the understanding of God that had been given to me. I did that by going beyond the written text and digging into the contextual world of the text.²²

Using this book, I have hosted workshops, Webinars, and counseling sessions with women who could not get past Paul's written words and their pastor's rejection. God has allowed me to curate a Facebook group, "D.A.M. Good Women Preachers," intending to help women discover, accept, and master their call in the pulpit, pew, and public places. Within this group, I provide training to women from throughout the country on sermon preparation, sermon writing, exegesis, and overcoming fear. For

²² Sherri L. Jackson, *Silent Not Me: Reimagining the Text That Keeps Women Out of the Pulpit* (Alexandria, LA: MV Consulting & Publishing Company, 2020), 10.

example, based on my book *Sermon Prep Made Easy: Six Steps Every Preacher Should Take Before Reaching the Pulpit*, I offer a course, “Sermon Prep 101,” in an individual or group setting. This course walks students through the exegetical process and sermon writing, with students leaving with a manuscript sermon. However, I believe that the greatest asset of the Facebook group is the gift of a non-judgmental space where women can come to terms with the rejection, isolation, guilt, and shame they experience as a preacher. Additionally, women find healing through their stories and strength to continue their journey in God’s purpose for them.

Meanwhile, my pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry degree is a natural progression in my educational and ministerial endeavors. This degree will culminate my Master of Science in Adult Education and my Master of Divinity, both of which have positioned me for this next level of work. Though I have been doing this work for several years, possessing a Doctor of Ministry will assist me in using the best research, scholarship, and practices available to establish a model that would help women identify and overcome patriarchal systems and practices that prohibit and reject their preaching call.

Synergy

An examination of my context and my ministerial journey propose a natural convergence of systemic patriarchy and how it affects women who have been called to preach. My subjective experiences, along with my education and prior work with women in my proposed context, rightly suggest that many women who are called to preach do not readily accept that call because models of resisting patriarchal systems and practices are not within reach. My goal is to analyze and illuminate the problem of patriarchy and

its effects on Black preaching women and move toward practices and models that affirm and celebrate them.

Additionally, as I examined my current context, evidence suggests that most Black Baptist churches are steeped in patriarchy, which affects women not only in the church but also in the community and the workplace. For example, to become a chaplain within the federal system requires one to be ordained and receive an ecclesial endorsement from one's national religious body. While Black Baptist women may have a Master of Divinity, if the local church does not ordain her and she does not obtain an endorsement, she will not be hired as a chaplain in the federal and many local healthcare systems. With the intervention of my male pastor, I was able to obtain my endorsement. However, many women will not be afforded this opportunity, which means they will not have an opportunity to advance as a chaplain or any other profession that requires these credentials. Not only can a lack of acceptance and ordination affect a woman's finances, but it also has emotional and psychological implications for women. When clerical doors are closed to women, they may experience low self-worth as they wonder if God cares about them as women. Toxic ideologies reinforced the idea that God does not use women, who are created to serve and support male clergy.

When pastors and churches do not embrace, affirm, or ordain preaching women, they may begin to believe that God prefers men over women in creation. Such thinking denies women the opportunity to live out their God-ordained purpose to preach. Therefore, some women die without acknowledging their call to preach or receiving affirmation through their religious bodies. In personal conversations with women, some

lamented that they are no longer affiliated with the Baptist church but have become members of other denominations and reformations that embrace preaching women.

I am drawn to this work because of my personal experiences, wounds, and pains. I firmly believe that my experiences are not new or unusual for black women in ministry or black women in the church. As much as I try to get away from this work, God keeps pulling me back to my purpose because women are still being called, and they are still being rejected or simply ignored. I am compelled to help women overcome the internal and external obstacles that prevent them from accepting their call to preach. My biggest asset to helping other women is my story of rejection and moving through the patriarchal systems and practices to answer my call.

I firmly believe that my work as a board-certified clinical chaplain shines brightly in how I offer spiritual and pastoral care to parishioners and community members. This work plays into the ministry God has given me at The Healing Place as I seek to provide a holistic approach by building a bridge between theology and psychology. This ministry model is evolving into more of a training, counseling, coaching center rather than a place of worship. Indeed, this model of ministry is different from anything that I have known or experienced.

My skills as a chaplain are well suited for ministry outside of a hospital setting. My six units of CPE have given me the skills needed to work with all populations in a non-judgmental environment. Some of my skills include incorporating the spiritual dimensions of human development into my ministry, functioning in a manner that respects the physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual boundaries, and fostering a collaborative relationship with community clergy and ecumenical faith groups. These

skills are profitable to me as I work with women struggling to overcome spiritual wounds of rejection, fear, and patriarchy.

What would it look like to reimagine the biblical texts used to maintain patriarchy as the status quo? What would it look like for the body of Christ to reflect the image of Christ without giving preferences to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or social status? What would it look like for Black women in Black Baptist churches to be affirmed in their callings as preachers of the gospel? These questions will be considered as I seek to establish a model that would assist women who are called to preach, give voice to their calling, and move forward in proclaiming the gospel message. Considering my context, where patriarchy is rooted in many of the Black Baptist churches, and how the current climate negatively impacts women who are called to preach, my passion and compassion compel me toward a project focus, *Preaching Women Matter: Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That Affirm Preaching Women in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana and Beyond*. I infer that despite the patriarchal systems and practices that reject women's call to preach and enter the ordained ministry, there is hope for women. I firmly believe that with education and affirmation – women who attend Black Baptist churches in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana – can live out their God-given purpose of preaching the gospel message.

Using my experiences and education in the identified context, I hope to institute a project that encompasses the following:

- Bringing awareness to women that patriarchy exists and how it impacts gendered roles in the church.

- Educating women on the exegesis of biblical texts that are often used to reject women's call to preach while also exposing women to biblical texts that affirm women's call to preach.
- Establishing support groups to affirm, embrace, and encourage women who are struggling to accept their call to preach, deal with rejection, or need an avenue for ministerial training.

Through this project, I intend to focus on establishing models and practices that seek to affirm women and offer solace to their wounds of rejection rather than debate whether women should preach or not. I propose implementing my project, “Preaching Women Matter: Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That Affirm Preaching Women in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana, and Beyond,” by gathering six to ten women members of Black Baptist churches in the defined context. These women, known as contextual associates, will participate in activities that will focus on education and socialization. The hope is that information will lead to transformation. My greatest desire is for women, who are called to preach, to go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

As I think about my journey and my chosen context, I readily identify a need for empowering women, who are assured of their calling to preach, but who are not affirmed and embraced in their calling because of patriarchy. Throughout this paper, it has been noted that women often do not answer their call because their male pastors reject them or ignore them. This rejection is steeped in two biblical texts in which the Apostle Paul appears to prohibit women as preachers or senior church leaders. Drawing a conclusion

based upon oral tradition rather than a careful analysis of the biblical text can be detrimental and dehumanizing for women. There is a need for women in the pew to see women in the pulpit as spiritual leaders, advocates, and sojourners. Women who cannot see themselves as being made in God's image rather than God's answer to accommodate men are prone to internalize the oppression and pass it along to other women.

Perhaps, if women could reimagine themselves as also being made in the image of God, they would understand patriarchy and how it affects them as a person, a woman, and a Christian. Just perhaps, if women understand that without a thorough examination and exegesis of scriptures, they will always be treated as second-class citizens in the body of Christ. I contend that until women protest and resist patriarchal systems, nothing will change. Conversely, when they understand that God did not house their spirit in a female body and then punish them for being a woman, nothing can stop them from declaring, "woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."²³

²³ 1 Cor 9:16.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

For many years I detested the Apostle Paul for what I believed was his undue influence on Christianity and churches. I thought he hated women. How could I not think this about Paul? After all, many of the sermons or Bible studies I heard based upon Paul's teachings appeared to center on women as second-class citizens. As I matured in my faith and broadened my understanding of the ancient biblical text, my perplexity around Paul's often quoted controversial statements regarding women increased as he appeared to contradict himself. In the letter to the church at Galatia, Paul in Galatians 3:28 appears to espouse the idea of equality among God's people. In another letter, 1 Timothy 2:11, he suggests to Timothy, his spiritual son, that women should be under the authority and leadership of men. In Romans 16:6, Paul greets women like Mary, "who has worked very hard," and Junia, "prominent among the apostles." Paul's requirement that women who prophesy should have their heads covered was even more puzzling. In 1 Corinthians 11:9, Paul articulates the need for head coverings when women pray or prophesy. Both require women to use their voices. What are we to make of these statements, and how should we apply them in 21st-century churches?

Paul's words regarding women and silence have caused me the most angst. Regardless of what Paul said before or after these words, "women should be silent in the

churches,” some churches have used these infamous words to subjugate women, mainly preaching women. These very words prevented me from readily accepting my call to preach. Based upon my personal experience, Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 have resulted in the subjugation and marginalization of women, who are often relegated to secondary roles. His statement is rooted in a Greco-Roman patriarchal culture sustained and perpetuated in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana — the context of my proposed project. I desire to develop a training program that would affirm women in their call to preach. I want women to know that there are other ways to read and understand this problematic text that has been used to silence them. Some Black pastors in my project area have embraced a liberal hermeneutic of Ephesians 6:5 and Colossian 3:22, instructing enslaved people to return to their masters. With these scriptures, it is widely accepted that “the Bible was used as a means of maintaining social control, as well as an instrument for exercising ‘moral and spiritual authority over the slave.’”¹ Yet, many would not and could not phantom that Paul’s words regarding slavery would be relevant thousands of years later. However, in my experience, many pastors have neglected to analyze for themselves Paul’s statements regarding women being silent in the assembly. Instead, they pass down what was given to them because this status quo interpretation maintains their patriarchal systems, practices, and power. In a lecture, Womanist theologian Renita Weems recommends that one be “mindful that claims about biblical

¹ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 6.

authority have been used by those in power to silence interpretations that run counter to the dominate interpretations.”²

My project is “Preaching Women Matter: Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That Affirm Preaching Women in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana and Beyond.” I have chosen to examine 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 as my biblical foundation text because I believe it may offer women other ways to view this text as ones that affirm their voices rather than silence them.

Through personal observation and experiences, it is evident that churches within my context are filled with mostly women, while the church’s pastoral leadership and governing bodies are comprised of men. While arguing her support of women’s ordination, Alice Felts, in an 1886 newspaper article, asserted that Black women have always been overlooked, even while being the backbone of the Black church. She posits:

I feel safe in saying that two-thirds of the present church membership are women and that if the Dollar Money, or ‘taxation’ of the Church as some call it, was collected only from the male members, the Church treasury would be decreased in a year to fully three-fourths of its present income. But as it is, the law accepts men and women both on equal basis and by so doing implies an equal right to representation in that part of the Church that the Dollar Money supports.³

Felts’ observations in 1886 are not much different from many women’s observations when it comes to women, ministry, and leadership in 2022. When women approach church leadership about the church's inequalities, they are often met with: "it takes time."

² Renita Weems, “Womanist Interpretation: Black Women Learning, Unlearning and Relearning to Read the Bible,” Lecture, Memphis Theological Seminary, Memphis, TN: Feb. 14, 2022.

³ Alice S. Felts, “Women in the Church,” Colored Conventions Project Digital Records, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/1254>.

Nannie Burroughs, corresponding secretary of the Women's Convention, Auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention USA, echoed Felts' sentiments regarding the importance of women to the Black church. Burroughs stated, "The Negro Church means the Negro woman. Without her, the race would not properly support five hundred churches in the whole world."⁴

More than 100 years after the observations of Felts and Burroughs, there has been much progress regarding gender inequality. A recent virtual panel discussion, "I Still Believe in the Black Church," bears this out. This panel included two clergywomen, two clergymen, and a political activist. When the conversation focused on the history of the Black church and her liberating work for racial equality, the men were vocal in spirited discussion. However, when the focus changed to gender equality within the Black church, the men were less vocal, leaving the two clergywomen to speak about the mistreatment of women in the Black church. Their silence suggested that gender inequality was not vital to them.⁵

An unbalanced power structure in the church is unjust, which goes against the principles of Jesus, the embodiment of salvation and liberation. However, with the right tools, strategies, education, and affirmation, women can subvert patriarchal systems and practices to accept their call to preach and enter ordained ministry.

Analyzing Paul's statement, "women should be silent in the churches," in 1 Corinthians 14:34 by using journalistic tools to ask some pertinent questions of the text that may bring clarity to Paul's statements. Following are some pertinent questions:

⁴ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 59.

⁵ The Folding Chair, "I Still Believe in the Black Church," Facebook post, February 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/thefoldingchaircenla/videos/1353179855134794>.

- To whom was Paul speaking?
- What was the setting of the letter?
- When did he make this statement?
- Where was this church located?
- Why did Paul feel the need to write the letter?

Regardless of the biblical translation one uses, Paul, at face value, admonishes women to remain silent in the assembly. Consider the following translations of 1 Corinthians 14:34:

- Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. (King James Version)
- Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. (New International Version)
- The women should be quiet during the meeting. They are not allowed to talk. Instead, they need to get under control, just as the Law says. (Common English Bible)

Is this a universal command, or does it only apply to the women at Corinth? Context

matters when establishing proper hermeneutics of a biblical text. Otherwise, preachers will engage in malpractice or harm in the pulpit with far-reaching implications.

Nevertheless, the goal of biblical exegesis is to shine a light on what Paul conveys in his statement and dispel the notion that the instructions to the Corinthian church prove that God does not call women to preach. The late Dr. Prathia Hall, a pastor and Womanist theologian, exclaimed, “For the same God who made me a preacher is the same God who made me a woman. And I am convinced that God was not confused on either.”⁶

⁶ Joy Bennett Kinnon, “Live Well - Wear Your Own Shoes,” *Ebony*, November 2002, 22.

Michael J. Gorman offers an exegetical method⁷ to determine whether Paul's instructions are concessions to the established cultural practices rather than a universal command for all women. Based upon some scholars, the contextual background posits that Paul's admonishment for silence was based upon the Mediterranean honor and shame culture to maintain order and unity within the body of Christ, the church. What's happening inside the Corinthian church cannot be void of the historical, social, political, and cultural domains for which the church exists. Also, understanding the genre of the biblical text and the literary structure of the passage will aid in understanding Paul's statement in the first century and how the underlying principles of the world of the text affect twenty-first-century congregations and women.

Before exploring the text, it is essential to define some key terms used throughout this paper. Consider the following terms:

- Patriarchy: a society, system, or group in which men dominate women and have power and authority.⁸
- Hermeneutics: the way one interprets scripture.⁹
- Culture: The language, customs, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identifiers and memories developed by the members of all social groups that make their social environment meaningful.¹⁰

⁷ Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 25.

⁸ *Open Education Sociology Dictionary*, s.v. "Patriarchy," <https://sociologydictionary.org/?s=patriarchy>.

⁹ Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, 25.

¹⁰ American Sociological Association, "Culture," <https://www.asanet.org/topics/culture>.

- Exegesis: the careful historical, literary, and theological analysis of a text.¹¹
- Egalitarianism: a movement based on the theological view that not only are all people equal before God in their personhood, but there are no gender-based limitations of what functions or roles each can fulfill in the home, the church, and the society.¹²

Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. (As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?) Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order.

Background and Literary Context of 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is one of twenty-one letters in the New Testament. Written by Paul while he was in Ephesus, a city in the Roman Empire, 1 Corinthians as a letter has a specific intent for a particular audience. Paul writes this letter at the end of his “three-year ministry toward the end of A.D. 56 or, more likely, at the beginning of A.D. 57, before

¹¹ Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, 10.

¹² Theopedia, s.v. “Egalitarianism,” <https://www.theopedia.com/egalitarianism>.

Pentecost.”¹³ The key to understanding and interpreting this book is acknowledging that 1 Corinthians is a response letter that addresses “the most fundamental problem in the Corinthian *ekklesia*,”¹⁴ which is “division of the community.”¹⁵ Ancients, including Paul, usually wrote letters as a substitute for their presence. Paul makes this claim in 1 Corinthians 5:1 writing, “For though absent in the body, I am present in spirit.” Even though Paul was not in Corinth, he had a vested interest in the well-being of the church and the believers. The letter serves as a “substitute for Paul's presence at the church in Roman Corinth even though he envisages a future visit to it. Like many other Greek letters in Hellenistic times, the letter expresses Paul's *parousia*, even though he himself is physically absent.”¹⁶

Ignoring the fact that 1 Corinthians is a letter leads to misinterpretation of the entire book and using that interpretation to build theologies and systems that favor one group of people at another group's expense is improper exegesis. This examination makes it clear that 1 Corinthians is a letter based upon the structure of the first nine verses, which includes the typical Greco-Roman letter format. Consider the following:

Almost all letters from the Greco-Roman period begin with a threefold salutation: Name of the Writer, to the Addressee, Greetings. Very often the next item in the letter would be a thanksgiving and/or prayer to the gods for the health or well-being of the addressee. Paul's letters follow this

¹³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 32 vol. Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 524

¹⁴ Mitzi J. Smith and Yung Suk Kim, *Toward Decentering the New Testament: A Reintroduction* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 223.

¹⁵ Smith and Kim, *Toward Decentering the New Testament*, 223.

¹⁶ E. Randolph Richards, “Letter,” in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. I-Ma, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld et al (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 639.

standard form; however, in his hands even these formal items are touched by the gospel so as to become distinctively Christian.¹⁷

There is little to dispute regarding the author of the letter. Paul identified himself as the writer. In verse 1, he identifies himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” He also lists Sonsthenes as a co-writer. Sonsthenes was “a Jew at Corinth, who was seized and beaten in the presence of Gallio, on the refusal of the latter to entertain the charge of heresy, which the Jews alleged against the apostle Paul.”¹⁸ Though Sonsthenes is listed as a co-writer of the letter, there does not appear to be a direct connection to the Corinthian church or the letter other than his affiliation with Paul. “Some have thought that he was a Christian and was maltreated thus by his own countrymen because he was known as a special friend of Paul.”¹⁹

Although Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:2 addresses the letter “to the church of God that is in Corinth,” scholars debate whether the letter is a circular letter, which means the letter should be distributed to all churches because the message applies to all believers. Scholars who agree that the letter is circular assume that position because Paul adds to the addresses those “called to be saints together with all those who in every place called on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. . .” Scholar Kenneth Bailey, in his book, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, writes:

Paul includes the entire church among his readers. He appears to be doing more than merely reminding the Corinthians that they belong to a larger

¹⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on The New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 23.

¹⁸ James Strong and John McClintock, “Sonsthenes,” *The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, <https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/S/sosthenes.html>.

¹⁹ Strong and McClintock, “Sonsthenes.”

fellowship, although that is surely part of his intent. Nor is he primarily affirming his authority over all the church, and thereby building his case for the authenticity of his apostleship. Rather, he stresses that he is indeed writing this letter for all Christians everywhere. This helps explain the extensive use of polished rhetoric, and the meticulous construction of the five essays before us. From Paul's own words we can be confident that Paul means this epistle as a 'general letter.'²⁰

Other scholars, including Craig Blomberg, lean towards the idea that the letter is a circular one but is only to be distributed to the several house churches of Corinth. He suggests that several house churches make up one main congregation in Corinth. Blomberg concludes, "The recipients of the letter are the Corinthian Christians. They probably comprise several house-congregations, but Paul addresses them as a collective whole, 'the church' or assembly of those God has saved."²¹ David DeSilva agrees with the concept of the Corinthian church being many house churches. He writes, "The Corinthian church was really a collection of house churches, patronized by several wealthy converts who owned homes large enough to accommodate the smaller cells of the church."²²

Another reason why this letter appears to be private is because Paul clarifies that this letter is in response to information he received from Christians in the church. They wanted to know what the Apostle believed about marriage, celibacy, foods offered to an idol, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, among other topics.²³ "Throughout the letter Paul needs

²⁰ Kenneth Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 59-60.

²¹ Craig L. Blomberg, "1 Corinthians," *The NIV Application Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 36.

²² David DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 562.

²³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 26.

to redefine terms that Christians had begun to distort or to use in ‘Corinthian’ ways, in effect to deconstruct and reconstruct ‘spirituality’ on their own terms.”²⁴

Canonical

There is not much debate surrounding the authorship of 1 Corinthians. “As early as AD 95, Clement of Rome mentions him as the author, and so do other early second-century church fathers such as Ignatius and Polycarp.”²⁵ However, some scholars maintain that Paul did not pen 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.²⁶ Theories abound on how these controversial verses made it into Paul’s letter. For example, some scholars suggest that the verses were margin notes Paul may have written, and a copyist placed the notes in the letter’s body. According to other scholars, someone else used Paul’s name to push an agenda regarding women. Then some scholars suggest these verses may have nothing to do with Paul. Instead, the verses are non-Pauline interpolations, which means someone may have put the words in the letters without Paul’s knowledge or permission. Consider the reasoning behind this line of thought:²⁷

- The verses in some Western manuscripts are transposed to the end of the chapter after verse 40.
- These verses don’t match Paul’s discussions about spiritual gifts.

²⁴ Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 26.

²⁵ Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., “1 Corinthians,” in *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive Publishers) 1337.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

²⁷ Andrew B. Spurgeon, “Pauline Commands and Women in 1 Corinthians 14,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168 (July-September): 320.

- These concepts are uncharacteristic of Paul.

Of the non-Pauline text, Kim argues, “Interestingly, 1 Cor 14:33b-36 has a parallel with 1 Tim 2:11-15, which is considered a non-Pauline text.”²⁸ Kim also maintains that those who disagreed with Paul’s egalitarian views later added the comments in the letter as a way to keep women in their places.²⁹ Still, another theory is that the verses are indeed Paul’s word. However, through an error, the verses were transposed. “The transposition could be explained as an accidental omission (an instance of haplography), in which a scribe’s eyes skipped”³⁰ from one word to another, “thus omitting verses 34-35. Then when the error was discovered, the missing verses (vv. 34-35) were inserted at the end of the chapter, after verse 40. Thus, there is no reason to argue for a non-Pauline interpolation of these verses.”³¹

Historical Analysis of Corinth

The congregations to which Paul addressed his letter are in Corinth, a merchant city, in which “all traffic from north to south and east to west had to pass through it.”³² “Only the tough survived at Corinth,”³³ according to a famous proverb noted by both Greeks and Romans. “Corinth established far-flung trade networks throughout the west of

²⁸ Kim, “1 Corinthians,” 227.

²⁹ Kim, “1 Corinthians,” 227.

³⁰ Spurgeon, “Pauline Commands,” 321.

³¹ Spurgeon, “Pauline Commands,” 321.

³² Adeyemo, *Africana Bible*, 1377.

³³ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Corinth,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol A-C, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld et al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 734.

Greece by means of its colonies and strategic position at the Isthmus.”³⁴ People traveled to the city to attend and participate in the Isthmian Games, which were held every two years “in honor of Poseidon.”³⁵ A male deity, Poseidon was a “brother of Zeus, the sky god and chief deity of ancient Greece, and of Hades, god of the underworld.”³⁶ The people at Corinth were generally competitive and had no problems promoting themselves or their achievements. “This ethos of independence, self-sufficiency, autonomy and self-promotion constituted the context within which the Christian community sought to grow and to discover its identity.”³⁷ The churches at Corinth competed with the Greco-Roman society, a mixture of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture.

Paul’s letter serves as an intervention for the church that is riddled with divisions among the various factions of the church. It appears that the competitive culture has seeped into the church causing a rift in the body of Christ. “The Corinthian Christians, however, fell into their learned behavior of measuring one against the other, arguing over their respective merits and forming factions around their favorite preacher (which may have included Cephas or Peter by the time 1 Corinthians was written.)”³⁸ Paul’s messages of unity and one church did not bode well in Corinth. An example of the Corinthian church’s competitive nature is evident in the quarrels that centered on various pastors

³⁴ James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn, eds., “Introduction: Excavating the Urban Life of Roman Corinth,” *The First Urban Churches 2: Roman Corinth*, 46, Society of Biblical Literature, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1j2n8pw.4>.

³⁵ Harrison and Welborn, “Introduction: Excavating the Urban Life,” 5.

³⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Poseidon,” Encyclopedia Britannica, March 24, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Poseidon>.

³⁷ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Corinth,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. A-C, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld et al (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 7338.

³⁸ DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 564.

within Corinth. In essence, they were pitting pastors against each other by saying, “‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”³⁹ Another example in their competitive spirit shows up in the way members were segregated during the Love Feast, a prelude to The Lord’s Supper. Paul rebukes the church because there were some who dined with the best food and drink while others had little or nothing to eat during the event. Paul condemns them by saying “For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.”⁴⁰ In a sense they had created a hierarchy as Paul was emphasizing in Christ there should be no divisions.

Unit of Text

Although 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 are the verses of contention, these verses are a part of a larger unit. Removing these verses from their whole dilutes the integrity of interpretation. These verses are a part of a pericope that begins in 14:26, forming a new section in Paul’s letter. Paul is now turning his attention to a new matter concerning negative behavior and attitudes among the believers, resulting in discord within the church. Before this pericope, Paul’s focus was on how spiritual gifts and prophecy should be used in congregational worship. Beginning in verse 26, Paul solves the problem that disrupts the unity in the church. “In a comprehensive admonition, Paul tells the believers how their conduct must be in meetings of the church, a conduct which takes account of

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:10.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:18.

circumstances and of Paul's directives."⁴¹ Paul ends this section in verse 40 by telling those who do not follow his prescribed rules regarding the gifts of tongues and prophecy to not speak in the congregational setting. Paul, in Chapter 15, turns his attention to the matter regarding the resurrection of the dead.

Detailed Analysis of 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

"What should be done then, friends?" This question in verse 26 speaks to the heart of this pericope. Everything that Paul says after this question is a solution to problems causing discord in the church. The issues revolved around the use of spiritual gifts in worship service. Paul lists five spiritual gifts: a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, and an interpretation. "Such abundant diversity of *pneumatika* could create disorder in their gathering, and Paul is anxious to have them conduct themselves with due order."⁴² In 1 Corinthians 14:1, "spiritual gifts are *pneumatika*."⁴³

It is evident by Paul's opening greeting in 1 Corinthians 1:10 that Paul, in his letter, is addressing both men and women. He uses the Greek term *adelphos*, meaning "fellow Christians," including men and women. Therefore, Paul encourages both men and women to remember the purpose of using spiritual gifts in worship. As a reminder, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:26, "Let all things be done for building up." When

⁴¹ F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), 334.

⁴² Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 525.

⁴³ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985, Olive Bible Software).

spiritual gifts are used, according to Paul, they should be done so to build up the Christian community or household of faith.

Paul formulates a community rule (*panta pros oikodomen genestho*), as he recommends again the same idea as in 14:35, 12, 17 (cf. 10:23). The conclusion of this discussion is found in 14:40, when Paul says, ‘All things should be done properly and in due order,’ with *panta . . . be one*’ (forming a rhetorical inclusio).⁴⁴

Paul recommended no one exercise their spiritual gifts in worship if doing so does not build up or edify the house or Christian community.

In verses 27-28, Paul turns his attention to the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, which comes from the Greek word, *glōssa*, which in the English language is translated as gift. He now “begins with a regulation about the one that has been causing most of the trouble.”⁴⁵ It is important to note that Paul is not against anyone speaking in tongues in public worship. This is evident in the conditional sentence, “If anyone speaks in a tongue . . .” Even so, he guides how and when speaking in tongues should be exercised. He continues by writing, “and someone should give an interpretation.” However, in verses 5 and 13, Paul provides different instructions allowing the speaker to be the interpreter.⁴⁶ Yet, in verse 27, Paul uses a Greek pronoun, *heis*, to suggest that the person speaking in tongues should not interpret the spoken tongues, and he stipulates someone else should be the interpreter.

In verse 28, Paul adds to his stipulation about speaking tongues in public worship. He writes, “But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in the church and speak to

⁴⁴ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 525.

⁴⁵ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 525.

⁴⁶ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 525.

themselves and to God.”⁴⁷ Fitzmyer maintains that Paul walks back his instructions by “adding the phrase ‘and to God,’ as an afterthought. The basis for the addition has already been expressed in verse 2. Paul is speaking clearly and dismisses uninterpreted tongue utterances.”⁴⁸ However, some scholars such as “Robertson and Plummer (First Corinthians 328) suggest that the two datives in 14:28 should be translated differently ‘to God’ but ‘for himself.’”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, according to Paul, if both prerequisites are not present, the person that is speaking in tongues should remain silent.

In verses 29-33a, Paul turns towards prophecy, a spiritual gift that is also disrupting Corinthian worship services. He explicitly talks about *prophētēs*, or prophets, which Paul's audience would understand as a “biblical proclaimer of a divinely inspired message.”⁵⁰ Additionally, “in the Greek world, people who declare things imparted by the gods in direct inspiration or through signs, their task [was] being one of interpretation.”⁵¹

Paul's directives concerning the gift of prophecy within worship services appear to differ from his directives regarding the use of tongues in public worship. Although both are spoken, Paul seems to consider whether the use of the gift results in building up the community of faith or tearing it down. Regarding the gift of prophecy, Paul uses the Greek word *dé*, which translates to the English word, “let.” His choice of words indicates

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:28.

⁴⁸ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 525

⁴⁹ Mark Taylor, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture 1 Corinthians*, v 28 (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 546.

⁵⁰ Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

⁵¹ Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

that he believes prophets and prophecy add value to public worship and are necessary. Still, prophets should operate in a decent and orderly manner, and those attending worship should have an opportunity to discuss what they have heard publicly. The phrase in verse 31, “for you can all prophesy one by one,” intimates that in the assembly were several congregants with the spiritual gift of prophecy. However, Paul does not deviate from his overall message that any use of gifts must be for the good of all. In the second portion of verse 31, he writes so that “all will learn and will be exhorted mutually.”⁵²

Finally, Paul gets to what are his most controversial statements. He turns his attention to verses 33b-36, which focus on women asking questions in church. Using the pattern that he has used when addressing the issue with tongues and prophecy, Paul addresses the issue regarding women asking questions in public worship. Up until this point in the pericope, in verses 26-33, Paul provides directions on hypothetical situations if they were to occur in the Corinthian church. However, in verse 34, Paul is dealing with what appears to be a specific problem: women speaking in church. “It may seem to be only loosely related to the speaking in tongues and prophecy that he has been discussing in the preceding pericopes, but it has to do with speaking and the good order of the assembled congregation, in which ‘all these things should be done for edification (14:26).’”⁵³ Some scholars maintain that the words written in verse 34 do not belong to Paul, “but rather added later at an early date by those who wanted to ensure that his comments about all participating in corporate worship were not taken to the radical

⁵² 1 Corinthians 14:31.

⁵³ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 528.

extreme of including women.”⁵⁴ Others maintain that the verse is “best explained as a gloss introduced into the text by the second- or third-generation Pauline interpreters who compiled the Pastoral Epistles.”⁵⁵ Following are some interpretations for what Paul may have meant about women keeping silent in the church:

- Paul is reacting “negatively to the practice of some Corinthian Christian women who have been pressing for equality and speaking out in sacred assemblies; he would be trying to save the women from disgracing themselves.”⁵⁶ In this sense, Paul may be trying to prevent women from embarrassing their husbands in an honor and shame society.
- The verses are a “parenthesis added by Paul in a marginal note at 14:33a, which he considered appropriate to his concern about proper order in the Christian community.”⁵⁷ Perhaps someone other than Paul added the verses within the passage.
- The verses are a “quotation of what some Corinthian Christian men have been maintaining against women who have been speaking out in cultic assemblies.”⁵⁸

At the end of Paul’s instructions in verse 34, Paul adds the phrase, “as the law governs.” In the Greek language, the word for law is *nómos*, which in this context “first means ‘what is proper.’ It thus comes to apply very broadly to any norm, rule, custom, usage, or tradition.”⁵⁹ Given the meaning and the context of the culture and why Paul wrote the letter, Paul is explicitly instructing the women to follow the prescribed culture or social custom of their Greco-Roman context. Thus, Paul could not be referring to

⁵⁴ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 246.

⁵⁵ Hays, *First Corinthians Interpretation*, 247.

⁵⁶ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 529.

⁵⁷ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 530.

⁵⁸ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 530.

⁵⁹ Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary*.

God's laws. Instead, he admonished the women in Corinth to follow the prescribed rules for first-century Greco-Roman women, who were “excluded from public and political arenas, and they were expected to refrain from any formal ‘public behavior.’”⁶⁰

Paul calls the women’s behavior shameful in 1 Corinthians 11:6 and 14:35 to describe their public behavior. Their behavior brought shame to their husbands, which is significant in an honor-shame society. For this reason, feminist scholar Elizabeth Fiorenza makes the case that Paul's instructions were explicitly for wives because “wives in Greco-Roman culture were not to speak to other women’s husbands.”⁶¹ However, not only were the women speaking to other women’s husbands, but they were also “pointing out mistakes men may have made in interpreting scripture or prophecies.”⁶² Regarding honor and shame, DeSilva writes,

the definitions of honorable and disgraceful behaviors vary between cultures and over time, but honor remains an abiding concern. Male honor and female honor tend to be defined differently according to the double standards of antiquity. Female honor was associated primarily with modest and chastity.⁶³

In some arenas, shame was “connected with an awareness of one's fallness and moral failure before God and before humanity.”⁶⁴ To change the status quo allowing women to speak in public could disrupt the unity that Paul is seeking to establish.

⁶⁰ Eliezer Gonzalez, “Gender and Shame in Paul’s Churches: Intersections Between Theology and Culture,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22, no.1 (2011): 51.

⁶¹ Krystin D. Higgins, “A Survey of Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35,” *Leaven* 9, no. 3 (January 1, 2001): 155.

⁶² Higgins, “A Survey of Interpretation,” 155.

⁶³ DeSilva, *First Corinthians*, 125.

⁶⁴ Catherine Kroeger, “The Apostle Paul and the Greco-Roman Cults of Women,” *Journal of The Evangelical Society* 30, no. 1 (1987): 223.

Paul's use of the Greek word *lalein* may clarify what Paul means. *Lalein* "refers to asking questions in public,"⁶⁵ rather than speaking in general, praying, or prophesying. If this is the case, Paul's instructions for women to refrain from talking in public worship are tied to teaching and learning, which were prohibited because this would "violate teachings about submission. A woman who taught somehow asserted an improper authority over her husband."⁶⁶ In such a case, the woman would bring shame herself and dishonor her husband.

In verse 36, Paul asks a pertinent question that undergirds all that he has written to the Corinthians. Rhetorically, he asks, "Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?"⁶⁷ "Paul wants the Corinthian men to realize that neither the gospel nor its implications for life have had a starting-point among them, and so they are in no way a law unto themselves."⁶⁸ The question appears to admonish men for their practices and to remind them that his ruling has nothing to do with them but for the sake of the gospel and the body of Christ. Therefore, these instructions should not be viewed as a universal prohibition against women preaching, teaching, or leading churches. Paul ends the pericope of 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 by emphasizing the goal of his instructions is to establish order in worship so that the gospel message is not hindered.

⁶⁵ James G. Sigountos and Myron Shank, "Public Roles for Women in the Pauline Church: A Reappraisal of the Evidence," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 26, no. 3 (September 1983): 284.

⁶⁶ Sigountos and Shank, "Public Roles for Women," 285.

⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:36.

⁶⁸ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 533.

Conclusion

There is no dispute on whether Paul instructs women to remain silent in public worship. However, based upon exegetical analysis of Paul's statements, it can be concluded that Paul was not perpetually talking to all women. Instead, he was talking to women, specifically to wives, who were disrupting public worship that brought disgrace to themselves and dishonor to their husbands. Therefore, they were disrupting the cultural norms, which Paul viewed as antithetical to the goal of building up the body of Christ. Paul was not instructing all women to remain silent in public worship. To remain silent would mean that women could not exercise their spiritual gifts of prophecy, which involves uttering words.

Though the specific question that Paul is answering was not written in the letter, the overarching question appears to center on how to establish and maintain order in public worship in the church at Corinth. Questions relating to the Lord's Supper and spiritual gifts each elicited a response in keeping with the edification of the body of Christ. Paul did not make the same claim regarding women in his letter to the churches at Galatia. In that letter, he concludes that there are no religious and cultural barriers in Christ. Paul did not make that claim in Galatians because the problems in Corinth were specific to that church, and he did not want anything to bring discord to the unity that he was establishing and promoting in Corinth.

Paul makes concessions in Corinth for the good of the whole. His means, by way of his instructions, justify the end of building up the body of Christ. Thousands of years after Paul wrote this letter, many churches in the twenty-first century and some churches in my context continue to take two verses out of the 437 verses in 1 Corinthians to

legislate what women can and cannot do in churches.⁶⁹ These same verses reject women's call to preach and cause women to question their call to the preaching ministry or church leadership. I, too, rejected my call to preach because I could not make sense of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:34. In my local, state, and national Baptist contexts, women are formed and socialized to be helpers and supporters of men, who are formed and socialized to be senior leaders of the church.

Admittedly, I bought into a patriarchal system and promoted it because I believed it was God-ordained. However, when God called me to preach, I had to sort out Paul's command in 1 Corinthians 14:34, along with Paul's pastoral epistles in Titus and 1 Timothy. These epistles are used to silence, oppress, and marginalize women who often are second-class citizens in churches, where women fill the pews and men fill the pulpit and other leadership positions.

I have not always understood why Paul said what he did about women in the church at Corinth. Based upon a careful analysis of the controversial text, I am secure in my calling because I know that Paul was not talking to women beyond the disruptive women in the Corinthian church. Whether Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 14:34 or the words were interpolations, I wish the terms never existed because many have taken his words out of context and used them against women in the pew, the pulpit, and public spaces. Nevertheless, women who attend churches located in Southeast Alexandria and beyond do not have to be silent. If God has called you to preach, go forth in the power of God's might. Women, raise your voices to preach the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ.

⁶⁹ Holy Word Church: An Open Christian Church, "How Many Words in Each Book of the Bible," <https://holyword.church/miscellaneous-resources/how-many-words-in-each-book-of-the-bible/>.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Consider the following quotes and engage your highest intellect to determine from which century they emanate. Here are the quotes:

We may be debarred entrance to many pulpits (as some of us now are) and stand at the door or on the street corner in order to preach to men and women. No difference when or where, we must preach a whole gospel.¹

To stop me from entering the pulpit, the pastor stood at the entrance and pointed at me to sit with the mother's board on the front room. He intended for me to preach from the floor at the announcement clerk's podium. To maintain my integrity and dignity, I chose to sit in the audience with my friends. I am not the announcement clerk. I am the preacher.²

Perhaps you are wondering if I have asked you a trick question. I assure you that it is not. However, it is a mental exercise to demonstrate how far women in ministry have or have not come since the 19th century. The first quote was spoken in the 19th century, and the second quote was written in the 21st century, specifically the year 2022. More than 100 years after Julia J. Foote spoke of the difficulties she faced, Black preaching women continue to face rejection and discrimination as they attempt to fulfill their call to

¹ Julia J. Foote, "Christian Perfection," in *Preaching With Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750-to the Present*, ed. Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas (New York, NY: W. Norton & Company, 2010), 179.

² Sherri L. Jackson, Personal Reflections regarding an event at Nazarene Baptist Church, Alexandria, Louisiana, 2006.

preach the liberating gospel of Jesus the Christ. Like Foote, in the 21st century, I have been barred from pulpits because of my gender. Conversely, there are some pulpits to which I have been welcomed despite my gender; however, these are few.

The Black church, birthed out of struggle, has a history of calling out racism and white supremacy. However, in my opinion, some within the Black church falls short in calling out gender discrimination and male supremacy. Indeed, there are some within the Black church context who are making great strides in rooting out practices and systems that overtly discriminate against women. I cannot describe the joy and excitement that permeates my soul for President Joe Biden's U. S. Supreme Court nominee Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's historic confirmation to the highest court in the land. Equally so, I am saddened that the Black church in many ways has not been supportive of preaching women, who like Jackson come to the table with the highest credentials.

The Black church has been a beacon of hope, refuge, and liberation for Blacks in the United States of America. When speaking of the Black church, it is "widely understood to include the following seven major Black Protestant denominations: National Baptist Convention, the National Baptist Convention of America, the Progressive National Convention, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and the Church of God in Christ."³

Though women have largely been excluded from church authoritative positions, including as pastors, deacons, and bishops, it does not mean that women were not

³ PBS, "God in America: The Black Church," <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/godinamerica-black-church/#:~:text=In%20the%201780s%2C%20a%20slave,African%20Baptist%20Church%20of%20Savannah>.

instrumental in establishing of the Black church. Yet, their influence and work “have not been properly acknowledged.”⁴ In the early years of the Black church, according to Bettye Collier-Thomas, “women lacked formal and titled authority in the church, but they were highly influential from the very beginning. And, given their membership numbers, which usually exceeded those of men, women possessed a great potential for power.”⁵ “Few male clergy or community leaders wanted women in leadership roles involving supervision over men. It was generally thought that women should occupy positions that required direct interaction and supervision of other females.”⁶

In my experience as a Black Baptist preaching woman, many religious leaders in Black Baptist churches within my context continue to relegate women to subservient roles involving women, children, or fundraising. However, God has gifted women with many spiritual gifts, including prophecy, preaching, and pastoring. Black women in the 19th century did not settle for being silent in their churches, communities, and denominations. Likewise, Black women in the 21st century do not have to settle for being silent in the church. My project is entitled “Preaching Women Matter: Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That Affirm Preaching Women in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana and Beyond.” In this paper, I will explore and examine the tragedies and triumphs of Black preaching women of the 19th century. How did they move within patriarchal practices and systems? What can Black preaching women of the 21st century learn from their ancestors? To answer these questions within these pages, I will address and explore

⁴ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 30.

⁵ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 30.

⁶ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 77.

the Second Great Awakening and its impact, the rise of Black women preachers in the 19th century, and the stories of notable Black women preachers in the 19th century.

The Second Great Awakening

To understand Black preaching women of the 19th century, one must center them in the Second Great Awakening of 1795-1835. During the First Great Awakening, “the religious earthquake that shook up Britain’s North American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s was a soul-saving message exalting Jesus’ gospel of blessed redemption and heavenly salvation in a fallen world.”⁷ According to historian Henry Louis Gates, the Second Great Awakening “emphasized the importance of converting people to Protestant Christianity.”⁸ Gates posits that worship services during this period included altar calls with an emphasis on testimonies of a personal encounter with Jesus and that one had received salvation.⁹

“Many Americans abandoned the hierarchical religion of their ancestors for a more egalitarian God who offered more immediate salvation.”¹⁰ Though the sermons did not preach against slavery, preachers preached to anyone, free or enslaved. According to an article published by the Public Broadcasting System, “The Methodist and the Baptists, in particular, welcomed converts from the black and white working population.”¹¹

⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2021), 40.

⁸ The Second Great Awakening, <https://www.crf-usa.org/images/pdf/the-second-great-awakening.pdf>.

⁹ Gates, *The Black Church*, 41.

¹⁰ “Africans in America: Religion and Slavery,” <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2narr2.html>.

¹¹ “Africans in America,” <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2narr2.html>.

“Many churches experienced a great increase in membership, particularly among Methodist and Baptist churches.”¹² However, whites did not readily accept Blacks as their equal but “a few came to consider it their Christian duty to teach their slaves about the Bible.”¹³ The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) is a product of whites not accepting Blacks as equals in the body of Christ. Consider the following historical data in support of the birth of the AMEC:

The AMEC grew out of the Free African Society (FAS) which Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and others established in Philadelphia in 1787. When officials at St. George’s MEC pulled blacks off their knees while praying, FAS members discovered just how far American Methodists would go to enforce racial discrimination against African Americans. Hence, these members of St. George’s made plans to transform their mutual aid society into an African congregation.¹⁴

Likewise, as more slaves joined the white Baptist church, racial discrimination showed its ugly head. Leroy Fitts, in his book, *A History of Black Baptists*, suggests that as Black membership within the Baptist church increased in the South, white Baptists found increased ways to accommodate slavery. Accommodations began with enslaved Baptists having “limited privileges and responsibilities.”¹⁵ Blacks lost more freedoms as white members of their Baptist churches continued to espouse slavery and its practices. “Some experienced some violence within its membership. Reverend Moses, a

¹² Second Great Awakening: Religious Movement, United States, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Second-Great-Awakening>.

¹³ Africans in America, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2narr2.html>.

¹⁴ African Methodist Episcopal Church, “Our History,” <https://www.ame-church.com/our-church/our-history/>.

¹⁵ Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1985), 25.

black preacher, was often whipped for holding meetings in connection with the church's ministry."¹⁶

Tired of facing dehumanization, enslaved preachers awakened to their religious plight and began to form separate movements from their white counterparts. Historians suggests that the first known Black Baptist church was "the African Baptist or 'Bluestone' Church on the William Byrd plantation near the Bluestone River in Mecklenberg, Virginia in 1758, and the Silver Bluff Baptist Church, located on the South Carolina bank of the Savannah River not far from Augusta, Georgia."¹⁷ It is believed that the "Silver Bluff Church was established by a slave named George Liele sometime between 1773 and 1775; the cornerstone of the present church building claims a founding date of 1750."¹⁸ As with many other slaves, "Liele embraced Christianity during the evangelistic revivals that followed the Great Awakening."¹⁹

As the number of independent Black Baptist churches increased, so did the number of Baptist associations and conventions that included the Foreign Mission Convention, the National Baptist Educational Convention, and the American National Baptist Convention and others.²⁰ Due to the consolidation of several other efforts to form a national organization, the National Baptist Convention of the United States of America

¹⁶ Fitts, *A History of Black Baptists*, 26.

¹⁷ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 23.

¹⁸ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 23.

¹⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 23.

²⁰ Fitts, *A History of Black Baptists*, 78-79.

was birthed on September 28, 1895, in Atlanta, GA,²¹ with the goal to “unite black Baptists and consolidate their influence.”²² “The decision to form a black national convention was motivated by discriminatory policies on the part of white Baptists, as well as by the growing support among African Americans in general for racial self-determination.”²³

The Second Great Awakening stirred up Blacks, who were a part of white churches, mostly Presbyterian, Baptists and Methodist churches. Historian and pastor Miles Mark Fisher suggested that “it was the Great Awakening after 1740 that reached the socially disinherited, including the Negroes.”²⁴ Blacks began to organize their own churches and separate from whites. The African Presbyterian Church was organized in 1807 in Philadelphia; Abyssinian Baptist Church was founded in 1808; the African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1816; and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was founded in 1820.²⁵

Not only did the Second Great Awakening birth many Black churches and religious organizations, it also spiritually awakened women. “There were at least three female converts to every two male converts between 1798 and 1826, according to the

²¹ National Baptist Convention, USA Revised Constitution, <https://www.nationalbaptist.com/assets/uploads/2018/03/NBCCConstitutionRevised2011.pdf>.

²² Meg Anderson, “National Baptist Convention (1895 -),” <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/national-baptist-convention-usa-inc-1895/>.

²³ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3.

²⁴ Miles Mark Fisher, “The Negro Church,” *The Crisis*, July 1938, 220, https://ia801800.us.archive.org/7/items/sim_crisis_1938-07_45_7/sim_crisis_1938-07_45_7.pdf.

²⁵ Fisher, “The Negro Church,” 220.

Reverend Ebenezer Porter's estimate in 1832."²⁶ Sanctification and holiness were major themes during the many revivals that were open to all people. Black women were especially drawn to the Methodist and Baptist churches "with the hope of freedom."²⁷ Black mothers were also drawn to the Methodist church "because of its support for the education of black children. In some cases, ministers would encourage slave owners to teach enslaved children how to read."²⁸ Black women saw the church as a pathway to their liberation and a way to "shape a gender identity of their own choosing."²⁹ Yet, as Black women found solace in their churches, affiliating with the Black denominations in many ways appeared to hinder them as Black women were limited in what they could and could not do in the church. Bettye Collier-Thomas suggests that "women were expected to function in subordinate or supporting roles with the church."³⁰

Many Black Baptist men who fought for racial determination did not see the need for gender equality. Instead, Black men sought to silence the voices of Black women. In essence, the oppressed became the oppressors by using the same tactics that silenced their voices. "Thus, tainted by the values of the larger American society, the black church sought to provide men with full manhood rights, while offering women a separate and unequal status."³¹

²⁶ Nancy F. Cott, "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England," *Feminist Studies* (Autumn 1975): 15.

²⁷ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 19.

²⁸ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 20.

²⁹ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 20.

³⁰ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice*, 31.

³¹ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 3.

The Rise of Black Women Preachers

“Women have been preaching in the United States since before its founding as a nation. Quaker women were preaching in the colonies long before the official birth of the United States in 1776.”³² As slaves, “some women assumed the role of preacher and conducted funeral services However, most slave preachers were male.”³³ Yet, the Second Great Awakening, characterized by holiness revivals, stirred up women who took to heart that they too were included in the gospel message. Many women, specifically free and enslaved Black women, announced their calling to preach with a message that uplifted their race spiritually and socially.

Scholar Lenora Tubbs Tisdale suggests there were three significant changes in the United States that resulted in the rise of women preachers. Consider Tisdale’s reasons for which she identifies these transitions.

Ecclesial and Theological Transitions

As revivals spread and new denominations or spiritual movements were birthed, there were more opportunities for women to preach. With “church hierarchies and polity or hemmed in by church dogmas,”³⁴ women “frequently found openings to respond to the Spirit’s promptings in their own lives, and to preach the gospel.”³⁵ Also, new sects or denominations were more likely to see their mission as bringing everyone to salvation.

³² Lenora Tubbs Tisdale, “Spirit on the Loose in Times of Transition: Early Women Preachers in the U.S.A,” <https://ul.qucosa.de/api/qucosa%3A15902/attachment/ATT-0/.26>.

³³ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus Jobs, and Justice*, 14.

³⁴ Tisdale, “Spirit on the Loose,” 29.

³⁵ Tisdale, “Spirit on the Loose,” 29.

For example, Millerites, followers of William Miller, a new England farmer, believed that the world was ending soon. “Confident that they were living in the last days of human history, they urged every convert, whether male or female, to spread the saving gospel of Christ.”³⁶ Catherine Brekus also suggested that it was not uncommon to see a woman preach. “Whenever Millerites, Freewill Baptists, Christians, African Methodists, or Methodists sat in a church or stood in a field to see a woman preach, [they] saw not only an individual woman, but a symbol of their identity as a chosen people.”³⁷

Political and Geographical Transitions

As new colonies and territories were founded, there were more opportunities for women to preach. There were “opportunities for preaching across continents that otherwise would [not] have existed and provided fertile new soil on which European women might preach.”³⁸ However, Black women were not often afforded the same opportunity while living “below the Mason Dixon line or in the other states where slavery was the norm.”³⁹ In the South, “societal pressures were stronger for women to stay in their place.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 160.

³⁷ Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 160

³⁸ Tisdale, “Spirit on the Loose,” 32.

³⁹ Tisdale, “Spirit on the Loose,” 29.

⁴⁰ Tisdale, “Spirit on the Loose,” 33.

Personal Transitions

More women began to preach as they felt the Holy Spirit wooing them to do the work. They often answered their calls despite opposition because they believed that God had called them to do so. In their sermons and autobiographies, they emphasized that they were “poor, uneducated, and lacking in eloquence, and marvel at being called in spite of their many limitations.”⁴¹ Even while believing that God had called them to preach, many of the women “delayed answering that calling for months or even years because of the opposition they faced.”⁴² Many faced personal illness and that may be contributed to not being able to readily answer their call to preach. For example, “Nancy Towle (a nineteenth century nondenominational preacher), debated for two years before finally becoming an itinerant; Jarena Lee waited eight years to take up her calling; and because she was illiterate and a slave, Elizabeth (a late eighteenth-century African American preacher), procrastinated for twenty-nine years.”⁴³

19th Century Black Preaching Women

Enslaved women were drawn to Christianity’s holiness preaching because of its emphasis on a conversion experience. Being alienated from their ancestors and in many cases their family members, Christianity provided an “entry to a different realm of power from that of their masters and connected them to a different sort of lineage from the ones

⁴¹ Tisdale, “Spirit on the Loose,” 34.

⁴² Tisdale, “Spirit on the Loose,” 34.

⁴³ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *How Women Transform Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2021), 38.

which had been denied them.”⁴⁴ Such religious experiences for some Black women helped them to make sense of their plight in life and for some “the power of direct encounters with God through prayer and visions not only illuminated their humanity but freed their voices.”⁴⁵ Each of them left narratives of their conversion experiences, their path to becoming preaching women, and the obstacles they faced. Consider the following:

They each overcame ridicule and rejection, penury, fears of re-enslavement and discriminations, and unhappy marriages among other obstacles. After experiences with conversion and sanctification, in which the Holy Spirit commissioned them to preach, they each set out to answer this call. Nothing could deter them — not laws and attitudes that opposed women’s preaching, not even geographical limits. These women spread their message throughout the Northeast, the mid-Atlantic states, the South, the Midwest, and even across oceans.⁴⁶

Among these Black women are Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia J. Foote, all of whom were affiliated with the Methodist Church. In this section are more details of these women’ lives, triumphs, and struggles.

Jarena Lee

Jarena Lee was born on February 11, 1783, in Cape May, New Jersey.⁴⁷ Lee outlines her spiritual conversion in her spiritual narrative, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the*

⁴⁴ Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman, eds. *This Far By Faith: Readings in African-American Women’s Religious Biography* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 4.

⁴⁵ Weisenfeld and Newman, *This Far By Faith*, 5.

⁴⁶ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 55.

⁴⁷ Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Printed and Published for the Author, 1849), 3.

Gospel. Published in 1863, “Lee devotes great attention to the ways in which her direct experiences with God following her conversion conferred on her the authority to speak as a religious leader as well as opened up possibilities for her life not previously available,”⁴⁸ states William L. Andrews, author and professor.

At times, Lee doubted her salvation resulting in suicidal attempts. She was drawn to the holiness movement and doctrine of sanctification as taught by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. “Lee became convinced that her conversion had been incomplete, for while she had been both ‘convicted for sin’ and ‘justified from sin,’ she had not yet received ‘the entire sanctification of the soul to God.’”⁴⁹ She prayed for three months to “attain this spiritual goal.”⁵⁰

About five years after Lee’s conversion, she sensed God’s calling to preach the gospel. In her narrative she recounts the details. She wrote the following:

An impressive silence fell upon me, and I stood as if someone was about to speak to me, yet I had no such thought in my heart. I distinctively heard, and most certainly understand, which said to me, ‘Go preach the Gospel!’ I immediately replied aloud, ‘No one will believe me.’ Again, I listened, and again the same voice seemed to say — ‘Preach the Gospel; I will put words in your mouth, and will turn your enemies to become your friends.’⁵¹

Lee acknowledged she was confused and prayed for clarity concerning the call.

Following several days of restless nights filled with dreams of her preaching, Lee

⁴⁸ Weisenfeld and Newman, *This Far By Faith*, 5.

⁴⁹ William L. Andrews, eds., *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women’s Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 5.

⁵⁰ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 10.

⁵¹ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 10.

approached then Rev. Richard Allen, who was leading the African Society.⁵²

Below is what Lee wrote concerning her exchange with Allen:

I told him that the Lord had revealed it to me, that I must preach the gospel. He replied, by asking, in what sphere I wished to move in? I said, among the Methodists. He then replied that a Mrs. Cook, a Methodist lady, had also some time before requested the same privilege; who, it was believed, had done so much good in the way of exhortation, and holding prayer meetings; and who has been permitted to do so by the verbal license of the preacher in charge at the time. But as to women preaching, he said that our Discipline knew nothing at all about it — that it did not call for women preachers.⁵³

Not ready to give up, Lee, in protest, asked,

Did not Mary first preach the risen Savior, and is not the doctrine of the resurrection the very climax of Christianity — hangs not all of our hope on this, as argued by St. Paul? Then did not Mary, a woman, preach the gospel? For she preached the resurrection of the crucified Son of God.⁵⁴

Sensing God had answered her, she wrote, “Since that time, 1807, until the present, 1833, I have not even doubted the power and goodness of God to keep me from falling, through the sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth.”⁵⁵

Lee married Joseph Lee, a Methodist pastor of a Society at Snow Hill, in 1811.⁵⁶

She complained that the move to Snow Hill left her with a lack of “closeness in communion and fellowship.”⁵⁷ She wanted her husband to move them back to Philadelphia, but he rejected that idea. She wrote, “this afflicted me a little.”⁵⁸

⁵² Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 11.

⁵³ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 11.

⁵⁴ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 11.

⁵⁵ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 12-13.

⁵⁶ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 13.

⁵⁷ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 13.

⁵⁸ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 13.

Additionally, Lee's husband forbade her to preach. "Being silenced in this way caused Jarena mental and physical discomfort."⁵⁹ Joseph Lee died in 1817 leaving his wife with two small sons to raise alone.

Eight years after talking to Richard Allen, Lee went back to him regarding her call to preach. At this time, Allen is bishop of the African Methodist in America. She said, "This subject was renewed in my mind; it was a fire shut up in my bones."⁶⁰ In 1819, while Lee attended a revival at Bethel Church, she felt the need to get up and preach. Of this event, she writes, "I told them I walk like Jonah, for it had been then nearly eight years since the Lord had called me to preach his gospel to the fallen sons and daughters of Adam's race, but that I had lingered like him and warned those who are as deeply guilty were the people of Nineveh."⁶¹

Lee related that she believed that she would "be expelled from the church"⁶² following her outburst. Instead, to Lee's surprise, Allen acknowledged that eight years earlier he had rejected Lee's call. He changed course by confessing that Lee "was called to that work as any preacher present."⁶³ Wanting proper credentials, during the 1849 General Conference, Lee requested her license to preach but she was denied. The denial did not stop Lee's work as an itinerant preacher. She continued her work and preached mostly on the East Coast. In one year alone, she "traveled two thousand three hundred

⁵⁹ Women and the American Story, "Life story: Jarena Lee (1783-1855), <https://wams.nyhistory.org/building-a-new-nation/american-woman/jarena-lee/>.

⁶⁰ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 15.

⁶¹ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 17.

⁶² Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 17.

⁶³ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 17.

and twenty-five miles and preached one hundred and seventy-eight sermons.”⁶⁴ On April 6, 2016, under the leadership of John Bryant, senior bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church’s Council of Bishops, “Jarena Lee [was ordained] posthumously during the 50th Quadrennial Session of the General Conference.”⁶⁵

Zilpha Elaw

Born around 1790 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Zilpha Elaw grew up in a religious family. Motherless at the age of twelve, Elaw moved in with a Quaker family. Viewing herself as an unrepentant sinner, Zilpha was frequently filled with remorse. Through prayer and contrition, she grew closer to God. Like Lee, Elaw published her autobiography, *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, An American of Colour*.

According to Elaw, she was converted at an early age and her whole being became filled with the Holy Ghost.⁶⁶ She married Joseph Elaw in 1810 and described him as “respectable,”⁶⁷ while acknowledging that he was not a Christian. Elaw attended her first camp meeting in 1817. “Awed by the camp meeting setting and the entire experience, she attended meetings as often as she could.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 17.

⁶⁵ World Methodist Council, “African Methodist Episcopal Church Posthumously Ordains Woman Preacher,” <http://firstfridayletter.worldmethodistcouncil.org/2016/04/african-methodist-episcopal-church-posthumously-ordainsfirst-womp/>.

⁶⁶ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Sons, 1997), 46.

⁶⁷ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 46.

⁶⁸ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 46.

One year after attending her first camp meeting, Elaw moved to Burlington, New Jersey, to live with her terminally ill sister, who would die a year later. Her call to preach came through her sister in a vision. Her sister “saw Jesus and was informed by an angel to ‘tell Zilpha that she must preach the gospel.’”⁶⁹ In her memoir, Elaw wrote, “I cannot describe my feelings at this juncture; I knew not what to do, nor where to go: and my dear sister was pressingly urgent for me to begin and preach directly.”⁷⁰

Elaw, as well as Lee, rejected her call because “she was particularly sensitive to the impact that such a decision could have on her marriage.”⁷¹ Like Lee, Elaw also endured physical illness before accepting her call to preach. She “almost died from an internal inflammation before commencing her preaching ministry.”⁷² Elaw did not seriously consider her call to preach until she “submitted to the Holy Ghost and the injunction that ‘thou must preach the gospel; and thou must travel far and wide.’”⁷³ This time she dismissed any concerns of her husband, children, family, or friends. Instead, she dedicated herself to “preaching wherever she could, fully empowered by the Holy Ghost.”⁷⁴ Even so, she endured persecution and her husband, who died in 1823, was

⁶⁹ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 46.

⁷⁰ Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw* (London, UK: West Virginia University Press, 1846), 33, <https://archive.org/details/MinisterialTravelsAndLaboursOfMrs.ZilphaElaw/page/n41/mode/2up>.

⁷¹ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 46.

⁷² Tisdale, “Spirits on the Loose,” 29.

⁷³ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 47.

⁷⁴ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 47.

“belittled for having a wife who chose to preach.”⁷⁵ Choosing to obey God’s voice came with a price of rejection from within the church. In her memoir she writes the following:

I was a person of no account, and ever had been; and I became so unpopular that all our coloured class abandoned me excepting three. Like Joseph, I was hated for my dreams; and like Paul, none stood with me. This treatment however painful, by no means damped my ardour in the work to which I had been called. I still continued in my Master’s work, and great crowds assembled every Lord’s day to hear my: the Lord was with me and strengthened me in my feeble labours; the number of white brethren and sisters who flocked to my ministry increased daily; the work prospered amazingly; and thus I had gone on for two months before my husband knew anything about it, for he never went to a place of worship.⁷⁶

Following the death of her husband, Elaw secured a job to satisfy some of her debt. However, she had to stop due to illness. She then opened a school so that children in her town would have an education. Yet, she remained unsatisfied with the direction of her life. Of that time, she wrote, “my mind was not long at rest in this situation; for the remembrance of the commission which I had received from the Lord very strongly impressed me; as the Lord had said, ‘Thou must preach the gospel, and thou must travel far and wide.’”⁷⁷ Throughout her life, Elaw preached throughout the country to “whites and blacks alike in an itinerant ministry.”⁷⁸ However, in the southern states, Elaw was faced with many prohibitions for which she was not deterred. “Elaw, like Lee, who preached in both Maryland and Virginia, defied such sanctions and risked imprisonment to reach African Americans who had, in many cases, fugitive access to religion.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 47.

⁷⁶ Elaw, *Ministerial Travels*, 49.

⁷⁷ Elaw, *Ministerial Travels*, 53.

⁷⁸ Teresa Zackodnik, *Press, Platform, Pulpit: Black Feminist Publics in the Era of Reform* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 9.

⁷⁹ Zackodnik, *Press, Platform, and Pulpit*, 10.

Elaw, considered an ancestor of women preachers, in the dedication section of her autobiography, admonished her readers to “walk worthy of the high vocation wherewith you are called, shunning carefully, the destructive vices which do deplorably abound in and disfigure the Christian community, in this day of feverish restlessness and mighty movement.”⁸⁰

Julia J. Foote

Among the Black preaching women of the 19th century is Julia Foote, who began her preaching career before the Civil War.⁸¹ She is an example of what it means to forge ahead despite internal and external obstacles. As the fourth child of former slaves, Foote’s parents hired her out to a white family as a means for her to attend school. Foote, at the age of sixteen, married George Foote and affiliated with the AME Zion Church in Boston, Massachusetts. “It was in Boston that she was moved to exhort and pray publicly, and she became committed to preaching the gospel. Ironically, for most of her life, she had been opposed to women preaching and had spoken against it.”⁸² Foote, in her autobiography, recalled her call to preach and her reluctance to do so. She wrote the following:

I took all my doubts and fears to the Lord in prayer, when, what seemed to be an angel, made his appearance. In his hand was a scroll, on which were these words: ‘Thee have I chosen to preach my Gospel without delay.’ The moment my eyes saw it, it appeared to be printed on my heart. The angel was gone in an instant, and I, in agony, cried, out, ‘Lord, I cannot do

⁸⁰ Elaw, *Ministerial Travels*, v, vi.

⁸¹ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 57.

⁸² Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 57.

it!’ It was eleven o’clock in the morning, yet everything grew dark as night. The darkness was so great that I feared to stir.⁸³

Foote described becoming ill “as one tormented.”⁸⁴ Following a night of prayer, she recounted the angel reappeared and stated, “You are lost unless you obey God’.”⁸⁵ Adding to her reluctance was the fact that she “had always been opposed to the preaching of women, and had spoken against it, though, I acknowledge without foundation.”⁸⁶ Likewise, her husband and her pastor, the Reverend Jehiel C. Beman, opposed her preaching. Two months after the angel’s second appearance, Foote relented and said, “I’ll go, Lord.”⁸⁷

Her husband threatened to send her back to her parents if she did not stop and Beman requested that AME Zion’s officials expel her from the church. She lost an appeal.⁸⁸ With a made-up mind she continued her work, which “put her in conflict with her family, friends, and black ministers, who challenged the right of women to preach.”⁸⁹ Without the blessings of her church, she “served as an itinerant evangelist and a Methodist holiness preacher, traveling and lecturing widely at camp meetings, revivals and churches in California, the Midwest, the Northeast and Canada.”⁹⁰ For those who

⁸³ Julia A. J. Foote, *A Brand Plucked From the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch* (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits Press, 2019), 66.

⁸⁴ Foote, *A Brand Plucked*, 66.

⁸⁵ Foote, *A Brand Plucked*, 67.

⁸⁶ Foote, *A Brand Plucked*, 67.

⁸⁷ Foote, *A Brand Plucked*, 68.

⁸⁸ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 19.

⁸⁹ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 59.

⁹⁰ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 59.

opposed her and other preaching women, Foote outlined in her spiritual autobiography, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*, “a strong feminist argument for including women preachers in the Christian Church polity.”⁹¹

The AME Zion Church changed its thinking regarding women’s roles in the church making the denomination the first “to grant women religious suffrage, which meant that they could vote on issues in their local churches and have a voice in the Annual and Quarterly conferences.”⁹² This move also opened doors for women’s advancement in the AME Zion Church. “At least on paper, women were eligible to serve in any and all positions,”⁹³ making it possible for Foote to be ordained as a deacon in 1895 and an elder in 1899.⁹⁴

Conclusion

While reading the autobiographies of 19th century Black women preachers, I am reminded of the ancient sacred text that reads: “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.”⁹⁵ There is nothing new under the sun in the ways preaching women have had to navigate their call to preach in systems of oppression. The stories of Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw and Julia J. Foote are my stories. They are the stories of many women who are called to preach but

⁹¹ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 59.

⁹² Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 93.

⁹³ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 93.

⁹⁴ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 93.

⁹⁵ Ecclesiastes 1:9.

rejected because of what I believed to be systems of oppression and patriarchy within churches and denominations that were birthed to flee oppression.

Like Foote, I too opposed women preachers based upon my biblical training and understanding of biblical texts that appear to silence women. As with Foote, I wrestled with Paul's voice and God's voice. As with Foote, I chose to obey God's voice. What if Lee, Elaw, and Foote had remained silent in their churches, communities, or families? Because they did not remain silent, 21st century preaching women have a blueprint of how to remain faithful to God amid systems and practices that are designed to oppress rather than liberate.

Historically, Methodism, which “espoused sanctification and holiness from the beginning,”⁹⁶ also tended to accept women preachers first. Additionally, “a preponderance of African-Americans was Methodist,”⁹⁷ which speaks to fewer Baptist women being among the preaching trailblazers of the 19th century. “Between 1870 and 1890, black Baptists, expanded their base, particularly in the rural South among former slaves.”⁹⁸ This demarcation is painfully evident in the South as slavery was the ruling force. Even in the South, “the Methodist Church was among the earliest of the denominations to recognize that slaves had souls and, in some quarters, to voice antislavery sentiments.”⁹⁹ Even as Blacks in the South fought for racial reconciliation,

⁹⁶ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 15.

⁹⁷ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 15.

⁹⁸ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 15.

⁹⁹ Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 25.

“male-biased traditions and rules of decorum sought to mute women’s voices and accentuate their subordinate status vis-à-vis men.”¹⁰⁰

As a Black Baptist preaching woman of the South, obtaining recognition remains difficult as many of the sentiments regarding gender roles speak as loud in the 21st century as they did in the 19th century. Nevertheless, I stand on the shoulders of Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia J. Foote, who had the fortitude and insight to leave their spiritual autobiographies that affirm the answer to Apostle Paul’s question “What then are we to say about these questions? If God is for us, who is against us?”¹⁰¹ Through their words and actions, “they taught by example as well as by their words how to negotiate the reality of what the world is with the Christian vision of what the world should be: a world that reflects God’s justice and love.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Romans 8:31.

¹⁰² Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 8.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Beginning on September 16, 2022, the movie, “The Woman King,” grossed “\$19 million dollars during its opening weekend.”¹ The success of the movie is largely because more than half of the ticket sales came from women. “Women made up a large percentage of the weekend’s sales, accounting for 61% of ticket buyers.”² The movie, starring Viola Davis, tells the story of a group of all-women fighters whose mission is to protect Dahomey, an African Kingdom in West Africa. The warriors are skilled, fierce, and committed to protecting their homeland.³ Movie director Gina Prince-Bythewood states, the movie “allows women to look up on screen and see themselves as heroic not as superheroes but real women.”⁴ Davis, who plays Nanisca, the mastermind of the female army, states, “This film is for the Black women who are out there on the periphery, a

¹ Okla Jones, “The Woman King Owns the Box Office, Earning \$19M in its Opening Weekend,” September 23, 2022, *Essence*, <https://www.essence.com/entertainment/the-woman-king-opening-week-end/?amp=1>.

² Jones, “The Woman King Owns the Box Office, Earning \$19M in its Opening Weekend.”

³ Manohla Dargis, “‘The Woman King’ Review: She Slays,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/15/movies/the-woman-king-review-viola-davis.html>.

⁴ Naledi Ushe, “Fact checking ‘The Woman King:’ What really happened, what didn’t in Viola Davis’ historical epic,” *USA Today*, September 17, 2022, [usatoday.com](https://www.usatoday.com).

conduit, a vehicle to shine a beautiful and glorious light. I'm really proud to be a part of that."⁵

Contributing to the movie's opening weekend box-office success are sixty women and fifteen girls from Alexandria, Louisiana. Led by Attorney Ingrid Johnson, the moviegoers not only watched the movie, but they also participated in an experience, "The Black Carpet powHER Experience,"⁶ that included a three-course meal at the historic Hotel Bentley in downtown Alexandria. Johnson intimates that the event is the result of an answered prayer.

I asked God how can this movie be more than something not viewed by women but be a meaningful reminder of their power as women to do as the cast members testified to with faith, courageousness, determination, standing, pressing, and overcoming on to victory.⁷

Following the movie, Johnson said, "There were many tears, hugs, and words of encouragement,"⁸ as women shared their stories of struggles and their means of survival in a society and system that are not always favorable. This atmosphere is mimicked throughout the country in kitchens, beauty shops, and church fellowship halls. I likened "The Woman King" to the movies, "The Color Purple" and "Waiting to Exhale," both of which centered women, their triumphs, and their challenges.

Though the movie tells the story of the women warriors and their epic battles, the movie is indicative of historical patriarchal systems and practices. Even in their strength,

⁵ Jones, "The Woman King Owns the Box Office, Earning \$19M in its Opening Weekend."

⁶ The Black Carpet powHER Experience is a dinner event that allowed Black women attending the movie, "Women King," as a community to discuss and discover their power as women to face difficult situations with faith, courage, and determination.

⁷ Ingrid Johnson, "Interview by Sherri L. Jackson," Alexandria, Louisiana, September 27, 2022.

⁸ Ingrid Johnson, "Interview by Sherri L. Jackson," Alexandria, Louisiana, September 27, 2022.

women warriors are under the command of the king, who wields his power as the women do his dirty work. Dargis, suggests that John Boyega, who plays the king, “gives the character the nonchalant imperiousness of a very important person who doesn’t seem to do much other than the most essential thing: hold power.”⁹ She continues, “If Ghezo wears the crown lightly, it’s only because others do his hard, dirty sometimes murderous work.”¹⁰ This observation strongly resonates with me as I contend that often Black women, including those in my targeted context, often do the heavy lifting while men hold the power. Of the more than thirty Black Baptist churches in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana, there is only one female Baptist pastor, and three Baptist churches that affirm women in ministry.

Though the movie rightly centers Dahomey’s African spiritual and religious practices, the God of my understanding voice is loud and clear. Specifically, God centers women, as the saviors of their male-dominated community. The women circumvent society’s expectation of them as wives, mothers, and queens. By doing so, God is showing women for ages to come that the mission is more important than the boundaries, expectations, and roles that humans have created at the expense of others. God is no respecter of persons and uses who God wills to do the work of ministry.

Still, “The Woman King” showcases the African women warriors as the center of attention, and this gesture brings their experiences, symbols, challenges, and community to the forefront. Patriarchy dominates both religious and secular spheres and has a direct impact on whether women not only survive but flourish in the pew, pulpit, and public

⁹ Dargis, “‘The Woman King’ Review: She Slays.”

¹⁰ Dargis, “‘The Woman King’ Review: She Slays.”

spaces. If Black women do not center themselves, who will do so? If Black women do not tell their own stories, who will tell them? If Black women's voices are silenced, who will speak for them? How will Black church women speak up for themselves if they are to remain silent in the church as the Apostle Paul instructs them to do in 1 Corinthians 14:34? The answers to these questions rest in the power of Womanist Theology, which informs my project, "Preaching Women Matter: Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That Affirm Preaching Women in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana and Beyond." This paper seeks to answer the questions by exploring Womanist Theology, its method of biblical interpretation, and its understanding of Christology. Additionally, throughout this paper my goal is to emphasize the need for Womanist Theology in relationship to Black Theology and Feminist Theology, all of which are rooted in liberation. It is impossible to see the value and importance of Womanist Theology without first defining theology and its implication for Christians, specifically Black women.

Theology is the ways in which people, formally and informally, talk about God.

Consider the following formal definition of theology:

A methodical investigation and interpretation of the content of Christian faith, the orderly clarification and explanation of what the Christian message affirms. From another angle, theology is an activity or function of the Christian church carried out by members of the church. It is faith seeking understanding, through which the church in every age reflects on the basis of its existence and the content of its message.¹¹

Theology is also be defined as a "reflection on Christian life amid struggles for freedom or liberation, for the full humanity of all persons, and for the transformation of human

¹¹ Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 1.

persons and societies as manifestations of and in expectation of the reign of God.”¹²

Therefore, theology fosters a conversation that focuses on who God is and how God interacts with humanity. One’s theological beliefs undergirds one’s conviction, speech, actions, and position on matters involving God, Christ, humanity, and scriptures. Stephen Webb, in his article “Christian Theology,” contends that theology is a means to help religious seekers, especially Christians, deal with questions and concepts to better shape their faith. “Unlike philosophy, which begins with skepticism in order to discern what human beliefs can be shown to be most certain and clear, theology begins with faith.”¹³

Theologians often divide theology into three categories: fundamental, systematic, and practical. Fundamental theology deals with the “intellectual credibility of the Christian belief.”¹⁴ Systematic theology is concerned with “how the various topics of theological discourse fit together like pieces in a puzzle,”¹⁵ and Practical Theology is concerned with how the church interacts with the culture around it.¹⁶

Womanist Theology: The Voice of Black Women

In 1969, theologian James H. Cone introduced Black Theology, a form of Liberation Theology that declared God is on the side of the oppressed. Therefore, God had a special affinity towards Black people, who were often the oppressed. Cone

¹² Thomas and Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 1.

¹³ Stephen H. Webb, “Christian Theology,” in *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*, eds. Donald Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), <https://www-ministrymatters-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/reader/9781426749919/#chapter19.html>.

¹⁴ Webb, “Christian Theology.”

¹⁵ Webb, “Christian Theology.”

¹⁶ Webb, “Christian Theology.”

contends that blackness is not limited to skin color, but it includes and takes on anything or anyone that is marginalized at the hands of white oppressors. Black Theology finds its roots in the Bible as Blacks see the oppression of the Israelites as their own. To this end, James Evans states, “The Bible became so important for Black people in America because in it they saw their own experiences reflected. Therefore, they understood themselves to be a part of the tradition of the faithful of history for whom the Bible was the standard by which fidelity was measured.”¹⁷ Cone, in his theological framework, maintains liberation is the core of Christian theology. He writes, “It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of a community relating forces of liberation, the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ.”¹⁸

For many Black women and Black women theologians, Black Theology did not give rise to their voices and struggles that encompassed race, class, and gender. Rufus Burrow opines, “By excluding black women and making them invisible in their theology, Black male liberation theologians did not feel compelled to address Black males’ misogyny and abusive treatment of black women.”¹⁹ Similarly, Feminist Theology, which seeks to align traditions, practices, and Scriptures through the eyes of women, often does so from a white, middle-class woman’s perspective that excludes Black women. Womanist theologian Emilie M. Towne intimates, “Feminist Theology often

¹⁷ James Evans, “Black Theology,” in *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*, eds, Donald Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), <http://www.ministrymatters.com/reader/9781426749919/#chapter16.html>.

¹⁸ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013). 1.

¹⁹ Rufus Burrow, Jr., “Development of Womanist Theology: Some Chief Characteristics,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 54, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 46.

reduced the variety of women's experiences to those of White, middle-class women, which, womanist theologians point out, does not address racism or classism."²⁰ The missing voices of Black women and their lived experiences birthed Womanist Theology, which makes Black women and what affects them the center of attention. Cheryl Kirk-Dugan suggests, "Womanist theology emerged as a corrective discipline during the 1980s, concerned about the plight of black women in the United States, of global African diasporan women, ultimately the wholeness of all persons across gender, race, class, age, and ability. Black women have lived the ontologies, existential realities, and subversive strategies that undergird Womanist thought."²¹

Though feminist theologians focus on racism, they do so primarily through the lens of white women. Feminist Theology does not pick up the banner of black women's everyday struggles with race, gender, or class, which prohibits it from being a universal theology. R. Ruth Barton states, "The feminist movement, both in society and within the Christian churches, has been one of white women – usually educated, middle-class – with freedom and privilege to become militant without fearing consequences as harsh as a woman of color or lower-class white woman would be subject to."²²

²⁰ Emilie M. Townes, "Womanist Theology," <https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/8226/Townes-WomanistTheology.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1>.

²¹ Cheryl A. Kirk-Dugan, "Womanist Theology as a Corrective to African American Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*, eds. Katie G. Cannon and Anthony B. Pinn (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 267.

²² R. Ruth Barton, "A Comparison and Contrast of Womanist and Feminist Theology and Experience," *Priscilla Papers* 9, no 4 (Fall 1995): 10, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/community.30700350.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A0fb8d1f19c37e38bec2129331c58e551&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&acceptTC=1.

Just as Black Theology has its roots in the Black Power Movement, Feminist Theology has roots in the secular feminist movement. Also, in the 1960s, Christian white women began to question Christianity's heavy patriarchal views, patterns, and symbols. The fight for white women had more to do with overthrowing a highly dominated male system within the church. "In a related fashion, too often white feminist theology creates a paradigm over against men; it is an oppositional theological discourse between females and males . . . Moreover, certain feminist theological trends regard the institutional church as a patriarchal space anathema to women, thus advising women to abandon the ecclesiastical mainstream."²³ Therefore, it appears that Feminist Theology and feminist theologians had a single focus, which did not encompass the struggles of Black women, who were often considered lowered than the same white women whose struggle was primarily with systems and beliefs that were heavily controlled by white men. Professor Linda E. Thomas states, "For the most part, feminism was seen as a middle-class movement by white women concerned only with gender discrimination. Feminism was done out of a white middle-class perspective and was seen as potentially destructive and divisive to the African American community."²⁴

Barton provides a great example of this paradigm using the Walt Disney movie "Mary Poppins," in which Mrs. Banks can participate in the Suffragette Movement with ease because her home and finances are secure. Nevertheless, Mrs. Banks faces the patriarchal hierarchy just as Black women. However, unlike her Black counterparts, Mrs.

²³ Linda E. Thomas, "Womanist Theology, Epistemology and a New Anthropological Paradigm," <http://www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm>.

²⁴ A. Elaine Crawford, "Womanist Christology: Where Have We Come From and Where Are We Going?" *Review & Expositor* 95, no. 3 (Sum 1998): 371.

Banks can participate with the ease of knowing her husband oversees everything, including her life. Barton maintains the following:

Unlike the life and death struggle for survival in which the black woman has been engaged, Mrs. Banks' fight for women's voting rights was only the diversion of a wealthy woman with little else to do in life. So even such a light-hearted movie reveals the truth of Frances Beale's comment that 'very few of these (middle-class white) women suffer the extreme economic exploitation that most black women are subject every day.'²⁵

Barton's point should not go unnoticed as many Black women, including Fannie Lou Hammer, Rosa Parks, and countless other Black women, took up the cause of voting rights. While the fictitious Mrs. Banks worked to gain voting rights for women, these Black women fought for equality of all people, including women. Generally, Black women, who participated in fighting for the equality of all, did so in fear that their actions could lead to death. This is a major difference between feminism and womanism, and likewise their various theologies.

Womanist Delores Williams is credited as the first to use the term Womanist Theology in an article that appeared in the March 2, 1987, issue of *Christianity and Crisis*. This theology "challenges structures, symbols, and socio-political realities that foster oppression/domination of black women in particular, as well as black men, humanity in general, and nature."²⁶

However, the term Womanist takes its cues from author Alice Walker, who in her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*, uses the term "womanish" to refer to girls who pushed the limits of their defined societal roles. According to Walker, the phrase, "you

²⁵ Barton, "A Comparison and Contrast of Womanist and Feminist Theology and Experience." 10.

²⁶ Crawford, "Womanist Christology: Where Have We Come From and Where are We Going?" 367.

acting womanish,”²⁷ refers to a girl who wants “to know more and in greater depth than is good for one — outrageous, audacious courageous and willful behavior.”²⁸ Being womanish is not a term of endearment. Instead, it is used as a means of chastisement and rebuke. It is used to suggest that a girl should get back in line within the boundaries and norms set for her. Yet, Walker takes this term a step further to suggest that a Womanist is “also responsible, in charge, serious.”²⁹

The definition of Womanist, according to Walker, has four parts. In addition to being womanish, or a Black girl acting grown, the other three parts include the following:

- A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength.³⁰
- Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.³¹
- Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.³²

Scholar-activist Katie G. Cannon is credited for developing womanist thought as a discipline. Cannon “adapted Walker’s definition as an analytical rubric. She recognized that neither traditional Feminist Theology, which problematized gender, nor traditional

²⁷ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1983), xi.

²⁸ Delores S. Williams, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Voices,” *Christianity and Crisis* (March 2, 1987), <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=445>.

²⁹ Williams, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Voices.”

³⁰ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, xi.

³¹ Walker, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, xii.

³² Walker, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, xii.

Black Theology, which problematized race, provided all the categories needed for her world, which included poor black women, ‘the least of these.’”³³ This idea of Black women being serious and taking charge did not start with Walker’s assessment of womanist thought. Burrow states, “The roots of womanist thought, especially the idea of the strong, responsible, self-determined, in charge black woman actually antedates American slavery.”³⁴ According to Womanist Irie Session, an in charge black woman is one who is “not defined by others, one not limited by normative paradigms or societal expectations.”³⁵ Women in West Africa, according to Burrow, “participated in their societies as full persons and were accorded the same human and other rights as men. So deeply did they cherish their humanity, and the rights accorded them that ‘from the beginning African women as well as men independently and collectively resisted enslavement.’”³⁶

Similarly, Black women religious scholars, uses Walker’s term, “Womanist” to describe a theology that seeks to affirm Black women, who have continually had to take charge of their homes, churches, and communities. Black women have had to do so while struggling to survive racism, sexism, and classism. Jacquelyn Grant describes a

³³ Kirk-Dugan, “Womanist Theology as a Corrective,” 267.

³⁴ Burrow, “Development of Womanist Theology: Some Chief Characteristics,” 42.

³⁵ Irie Session, “Womanist Tenets: Preaching and Pedagogy with Marginalized Women,” August 13, 2017, <https://www.dririe.com/blog/womanist-tenets-preaching-and-pedagogy-with-marginalized-women>.

³⁶ Burrow, “Development of Womanist Theology: Some Chief Characteristics,” 42.

Womanist as one who has “developed survival strategies in spite of the oppression of her race and sex in order to save her family.”³⁷

Another major difference between feminists and Womanists, according to Barton, is their relationship to Liberation Theology. While those who espouse Womanist Theology do not think that Liberation Theology takes into full account their experiences, voices, and struggles, unlike feminists, Womanists do not seek to totally distance themselves from men. A major thrust of Womanist Theology is justice for all, including men. Grant suggests that “many black people today see the white feminist movement as an attempt to divide black people. Contemporary black feminists caution against espousing the more ‘radical’ white feminist stances because these stances leave out, as irrelevant, black men, black children, black families.”³⁸ On the other end of the spectrum, feminists “have often demonstrated a hatred or at least a lack of respect for men, and, at times, a deplorable lack of concern for the well-being of children and families.”³⁹ Conflict may surface as Black women question if they should remain loyal to Black men, who are often the biggest oppressors of Black women. As Barton states, “black women often feel torn between their loyalty to their racial community and their need to struggle against sexism.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Jacquelyn Grant, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Experience,” in *Encyclopedia of African American Religions*, eds. Larry G. Murphy, J. Gordon Melton, and Gary L. Ward (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 213.

³⁸ Barton, “A Comparison and Contrast of Womanist and Feminist Theology and Experience,” 11.

³⁹ Barton, “A Comparison and Contrast of Womanist and Feminist Theology and Experience,” 11.

⁴⁰ Barton, “A Comparison and Contrast of Womanist and Feminist Theology and Experience,” 11.

Womanist Theology and Biblical Interpretation

Kelly Brown Douglas, in her essay, “Marginalized People, Liberating Perspectives: A Womanist Approach to Biblical Interpretation,” opines that Womanists come to biblical texts “as embodied beings, how we experience life socially and culturally, as well as what we perceive as the meaning and value of life.”⁴¹ Douglas continues this thought by stating, “A womanist approach to biblical interpretation, like womanist perspectives in general, begins with the recognition that our society and many of our churches are marred by interlocking and interactive structures of domination.”⁴²

Womanists and feminists differ in their approach to biblical interpretation and their emphases of theological understanding. Both emphases emanate from the experiences of the women involved. For example, those within the Womanist tradition resonate with biblical texts that speak to the spirit of struggle and survival in women. Douglas maintains “Black women in every era of this country’s history have, as a rule, understood the necessity of doing whatever is necessary to protect and defend both themselves and black families, and thus the black community.”⁴³ Womanist theologians find solace in the stories of Hagar, Sarah’s maiden, given to Abraham to bear a son; Egypt’s midwives, who had made a conscious decision not to follow Pharaoh’s orders to kill the Hebrew babies; and Moses’ sister, daughter and mother. Each of these women had a spirit of survival that resonates particularly to African American women, who often find

⁴¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, “Marginalized People, Liberating Perspectives: A Womanist Approach to Biblical Interpretation,” *Anglican Theological Review* 83, no. 1, (2001): 41.

⁴² Douglas, “Marginalized People,” 14.

⁴³ Burrow, “Development of Womanist Theology: Some Chief Characteristics,” 48.

themselves having to make survivalists decisions as they carry the burden of their families, gender, race, and class. Consider the following from Delores Williams:

My womanist reading of (the story of Hagar) sees God as responding to the African slave Hagar and her child in terms of survival strategies... God's promise to Hagar throughout her story is one of survival (of her progeny) and not liberation. When they and their families get into serious social and economic straits, Black Christian women have believed that God helps them make a way out of no way.⁴⁴

Conversely, those within the feminist tradition tend to focus more on stories of women, who were liberated from their bondage or problems. Barton portrays women such as “Deborah, Hulda, Abigail, Esther, and Sarah as role models of ‘liberated women’ who found the freedom to be all that God wanted them to be.”⁴⁵ A cursory review of these women suggest that they come off looking like heroes, women who pulled themselves up from their bootstraps and sat in seats of power. They differ from women, such as Rahab, Hagar and Moses’ sister, Miriam, whose stories of survival are often buried at the expense of highlighting their negatives. Even within the Black church tradition, which is often led by Black men, the strength and survival strategies of these women are often not mentioned.

Hebrew Bible scholar Wilda C. Gafney, in her book, *A Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, suggests that Womanists and feminists interrogate the biblical texts differently. Womanists, Gafney states, “ask

⁴⁴ Burrow, “Development of Womanist Theology: Some Chief Characteristics,” 48.

⁴⁵ Barton, “A Comparison and Contrast of Womanist and Feminist Theology and Experience, 11.

questions about power, authority, voice, agency, hierarchy, inclusion, and exclusion.”⁴⁶

Some of the questions Womanists may ask of the biblical text include:⁴⁷

- Who is speaking and/or active?
- Where are the women and girls, what are they doing, and what are their names?
- What are the power dynamics in the narrative?
- How have black women historically related to the text?
- How does (can) this text function as Scripture for black women?
- Who is (what is the construction of) God in the text? Is s/he/it invested in the flourishing of black women, our families, and our worlds?

Biblical scholar Renita Weems is among the first Womanists to write a book of Bible studies that specifically focused on Womanist biblical interpretation. In her groundbreaking work, *Just a Sister Away: Women's Relationships in the Bible*, she “offers readings of biblical texts that address some of the experiences and concerns of African American Christian women.”⁴⁸ Weems’ work allows women to see themselves in biblical text in ways that they may not relate on Sunday mornings and in Wednesday night Bible studies. She writes:

Dutifully, we have sat through sermons, lectures, and Bible study lessons, nodding when appropriate, copiously taken notes when expected, and when called upon obediently recapitulating what we have been told. All the while our souls have remained starved for a new revelation on the role of women in salvation history. Surely, God did not mean for us to be a footnote to redemption.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 7.

⁴⁷ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, 8.

⁴⁸ Nyasha Junior, *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 98.

⁴⁹ Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988), viii.

Weems acknowledges that she writes *Just a Sister Away* “unapologetically with African-American women in mind as a way of reminding us that we are not an afterthought to salvation.”⁵⁰

Other Womanist religious scholars and their works to aid in biblical interpretation include Clarice J. Martin with her work of essays, which included “Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament: The Quest for Holistic and Inclusive Translation and Interpretation.” In her work “she placed the interpretive interests of women of color in general and black women in particular at the forefront.”⁵¹ Though Weems and Martin are among the earliest Womanist religious scholars, Shanell Smith published *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire: Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist Hermeneutics of Ambivalence* in 2014,⁵² and Mitzi J. Smith, who published *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Reader* in 2015.⁵³ Smith and Nyasha Junior acknowledge “a motivating factor for writing their respective books was the lack of a textbook on womanist biblical scholarship when they were seminary students.”⁵⁴ Thus, it is Womanists, who give voices to Black women in the pew and in the pulpit.

⁵⁰ Weems, *Just A Sister Away: Women's Relationships in the Bible*, ix

⁵¹ Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, “Methods and the Making of Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, eds. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016) 4, <https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/060688P-front.pdf>.

⁵² Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, 6.

⁵³ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, 6.

⁵⁴ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, 6.

Womanists and Christology

“I’m in trouble.”⁵⁵ Harriet Tubman speaks these words as she ponders her freedom from slavery. What trouble is she experiencing? Afterall, “She is finally free. Her prayers had been answered; her dream had come true. She had reached the ‘state’ which she perceived to be like heaven – freedom – the long-awaited reality.”⁵⁶ Tubman’s uneasiness with her own freedom may rest in her understanding and belief of what freedom is. She equates freedom with the good news, or the gospel of Jesus that must be experienced and shared. Tubman’s trouble regarding her freedom is that she could not experience the fullness of her freedom until all she knew and encountered had experienced the same freedom on earth as well as in heaven. For Tubman, “the will for her family members and others to have the ‘heaven-like’ experienced was matched by her Christian beliefs. The nature of her Christian belief was of such that, as sung in the old-time gospel song, she ‘just couldn’t keep it to herself.’”⁵⁷

Christology is the study of Jesus. Larry Hurtado states that Christology “is usually focused on the ways that NT writings articulates and reflect convictions and claims about Jesus Christ.”⁵⁸ In Mark 8:29, as Jesus is walking with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, he asks a question, “Who do people say that I am?”⁵⁹ After hearing the disciples provide answers based upon other people’s opinions of him, Jesus asks, “But

⁵⁵ Jacquelyn Grant, “‘Come to My Help Lord For I’m in Trouble’: Womanist Jesus and the Mutual Struggle for Liberation,” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 8, no. 1 (May 1994): 21.

⁵⁶ Grant, “Come to My Help Lord For I’m in Trouble,” 21.

⁵⁷ Grant, “Come to My Help Lord For I’m in Trouble,” 22.

⁵⁸ Larry Hurtado, “Christology,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Volume 1 A-C (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 612.

⁵⁹ Mark 8:29, NRSV.

who do you say that I am?”⁶⁰ For Womanists, Jesus is the great liberator, which is rooted in Tubman’s understanding of the gospel that is marked with freedom. Womanists are not content until freedom is experienced and shared by all. However, for Womanists the essence of the gospel must speak to the lived experiences of Black women, who face racism, sexism, and classism. Grant asks, “What happens when the nature of the gospel and the nature of the existential situation render one in direct conflict with the ‘human principalities and powers that be?’ Isn’t that often what being a Christian means? — challenging unjust and evil powers.”⁶¹ In essence, Black women live in perpetual trouble, and “Jesus for many Black Women, has been the consistent force which has enabled them not only to survive the ‘troubles’ of the world, but to move beyond them and inspite of them.”⁶² Grant intimates that the Jesus, whom Black women find their means of survival, “has been a primary tool for undergirding oppressive structures.”⁶³ For example, according to Grant, “Jesus Christ is often used to justify the subordination of women in the church,”⁶⁴ which is steeped in male dominance. The trouble, as Tubman opines, presents a paradox for women, who find solace in the same Jesus but face a Christology that is detrimental to them. Grant writes, “Women have been denied (humanity, personhood, leadership, equality, etc.) because of the Church’s history of negative Christology.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Mark 8:29.

⁶¹ Grant, “Come to My Help Lord For I’m in Trouble,” 22.

⁶² Grant, “Come to My Help Lord For I’m in Trouble,” 22.

⁶³ Grant, “Come to My Help Lord For I’m in Trouble,” 23.

⁶⁴ Grant, “Come to My Help Lord For I’m in Trouble,” 23.

⁶⁵ Grant, “Come to My Help Lord For I’m in Trouble,” 24.

A major theological difference between Womanists and feminists is found in their views of Christology, which answers the question of who Jesus is. Womanists tend to focus on Jesus' humanity. Feminists tend to focus on Jesus' maleness, which propel them to seek ways to negate Jesus' gender so that women could easily identify with his redemptive work and ways of being. Conversely, Womanists do not seek to negate Jesus' gender, but instead seek to align themselves with his work on behalf of the oppressed. Kelly Brown Douglas asserts, "African American women identify with what Jesus has done in their lives, not with how he looks."⁶⁶ However, on the other end of the spectrum, feminists seek to rid Christianity of anything relating to male symbols that perpetuate sexism within the Church. David Scaer states, "For theological feminism an all-male clergy is as symbolically offensive as is the crucified male figure of Jesus. The person of the pastor speaks volumes about our image of God. When a woman claims to be the pastor, the volumes are opened to what feminists think about God."⁶⁷

Womanist prefer to focus on what Jesus did rather than who he is. Consider the following from M. Shawn Copeland:

Jesus acted in ways that defied the patriarchal expression of masculinity through coerciveness, power exploitation, and exclusion of others. He stretched solidarity to the point of challenging us to love our enemies, choosing women as disciples, overturning patriarchal male structures, and practicing masculinity through kenosis (self-emptying). He emptied Himself of all that would subvert authentic human liberation. In other words, his maleness undermined typical patriarchal oppression.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Raquel A. St. Clair, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 18.

⁶⁷ David Scaer, "Christology and Feminism," *Logia* 9, no. 1 (2000): 4.

⁶⁸ M. Shawn Copeland, "Marking the Body of Jesus, the Body of Christ," in *The Strength of Her Witness: Jesus Christ in the Global Voices of Women*, ed. Elizabeth A. Johnson (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2016), 274.

Grant intimates that Christology does not have to be the “white racist Christology of Europe and North America or by a male-dominated expression of it. She wants to offer a Christology that is both black and feminist, with racism as a greater heresy than is the sexism of male domination.”⁶⁹ For Grant, author of *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, it is far more important to focus on Jesus’ work with the poor and liberating messages for Black women rather than focusing on Jesus’ gender. Grant sees this focus on feminism as a distraction from Christianity and Jesus’ liberating message.

Black women have an affinity to Jesus as they identify with his mission and liberative work that includes suffering. Raquel A. St. Clair, in her work, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark*, identifies some of the reasons. She writes, “First womanists contend that Jesus makes God real to African American women. Second, womanists assert the interpretations of Jesus that African American women accept will also be the interpretations they accept about their own lives and selves.”⁷⁰ Along those same lines Douglas asserts, “Jesus of Nazareth makes God real, brings God down to earth for black women.”⁷¹

Though Womanists identify with Jesus’ suffering, “Womanists emphasize that his significance for them is not found in his suffering. For womanists, Jesus’ significance is found in his ministry. In other words, womanists acknowledge that there are definite

⁶⁹ Scaer, “Christology and Feminism,” 4.

⁷⁰ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark*, 18.

⁷¹ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark*, 18.

points of connection between Jesus' suffering and that of African American women."⁷²

This identification with suffering is not at the heart of who Jesus is for womanists.

Instead, it is what Jesus did and who Jesus is. As evidence of this assertion, Williams contends that the "parables, healings, exorcisms, and prayer life of Jesus as proof that 'humankind is, then, redeemed through Jesus' ministerial vision of life and not through his death.'"⁷³

Conclusion

"The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman."⁷⁴ Malcolm X spoke these words on May 22, 1962, in Los Angeles, California. Of his speech, Feminista Jones writes, "During this speech, he spoke to the negative ways in which Black women are treated, and he called on us, Black women to think about the harmful internalization of society's loathing of who we are, particularly when it comes to our natural appearance."⁷⁵

More than fifty years later, Malcolm X's words ring true for Black women, who experience disrespect, injustice, and neglect in both religious and secular spheres. I have experienced all in my secular career endeavors. However, what gives me pause is that Black women face such in their religious circles, where they are often the most loyal, most supportive, and major contributors. In many Black Baptist churches, including

⁷² St. Clair, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark*, 21.

⁷³ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark*, 21-22.

⁷⁴ Feminista Jones, "Malcolm X Stood Up for Black Women Few Others Would," <https://zora.medium.com/malcolm-x-stood-up-for-black-women-when-few-others-would-68e8b2ea2747>.

⁷⁵ Jones, "Malcolm X Stood Up for Black Women Few Others Would."

many in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana, women are only as free as the boundaries that have been drawn for them. Women, who dare to venture outside of those boundaries, are deemed unladylike, radicals, and rebels for not knowing their places, which certainly does not include the pulpit.

As I review my life's journey, it is safe say that long before Walker coined the term in 1982, I was a Womanist girl, who would be at home with Womanist Theology. I vividly remember my great-aunts telling my grandmother, "Ola, you're going to have to do something with that girl. She's just so womanish." The church women corroborated my great-aunts' critique of me for not knowing my place, talking too much, speaking out of turn, and being in grown-folks business. Yet, these same church women recognized the strength of my being and the strength of my voice as they paraded me from local, state, and national Baptist churches and conventions to bring home the prizes from the oratorical contests. However, they did not know what to do with me outside of the established boundary lines.

As an adult Black Baptist woman of faith, I proudly describe myself as a womanish woman, who believes in and practices Womanist Theology. Womanism validates my concerns and experiences as a Black woman, who every day faces patriarchal systems and practices as I seek to fulfill my God-ordained call as a preaching woman. Womanist Theology gives voice to Black women, who are often limited in what they can say, what they can do and where they can exist. For me, Womanist Theology is akin to being Jesus incarnate as this theology seeks to bring the good news to all people and not just to a select few. Jesus, in my opinion, is a model of what it means to not allow

his male privileges to lord over women but to see them not only as ones who need a Savior but as ones who can bring salvation to others.

In reflecting on white women's Christ and Black women's Jesus, I am reminded that the Black church tends to place a heavy focus on Jesus' humanity. The idea that Jesus disrupted the culture's status quo treatment of women speaks volumes to me and helps me to accept that I do not have to feel ashamed of being a woman or even a Black preaching woman. Throughout the gospel of Luke, Jesus does the unthinkable acts of making the outcasts the hero of the stories. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an example of an unlikely person being cast as the hero as does the parable of the Great Banquet in which Jesus invites the unmentionables to the feast. Both parables go against the norms of that society. The mere fact that Jesus would be found in the company of a woman of ill reputation in broad daylight at a well allows me and other women to know that Jesus did not intend for women to continue being on the underside and that they have a place in mainstream society. Therefore, I choose to follow Jesus' words and deeds concerning women rather than Paul's admonition that women are to keep silent in the church. Even if Paul's theology dictates that women are subordinate to men, the liberating message and work of Jesus invalidates Paul's claim.

Liberation is at the heart of Christology, which speaks to who Jesus is and his mission on earth. Christ's redemptive work on the cross is not limited to getting people to heaven, but it directly aligns with allowing people to live on earth as if they were in heaven. Jesus makes this case in his mission statement outlined in Luke 4:18-19, which states, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight

to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus' longing to redeem captives of any form of oppression is evident in the ways he interacted with the least, the lost, and the left out, which includes women.

The strength of womanism is its desire to speak for all the downtrodden and oppressed. This strength of womanism considers Jesus' role that focuses on setting all captives free. Black women, sometimes at their own expense, have always taken care of everything and everybody, including Black men, who are at times the oppressor. Even so, womanism places special attention on Black women, who must contend with sexism, classism, and racism. This tridimensional discrimination was especially prevalent when the idea of Womanist Theology emerged in a society that did not see Black women as a threat; therefore, society did not even consider Black women as a group to whom to listen or to care about what negatively affected them.

Finally, Cone, in his 40th anniversary edition of his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Fortieth Anniversary Edition*, acknowledges that he erred in neglecting sexism and plight of Black women. In fact, he writes that he was "embarrassed by that failure"⁷⁶ and that in some way he wanted to rectify his wrongs. He did so by being sure to reissue his new volume by "changing the exclusive language of the 1970 edition to inclusive language."⁷⁷ Though Cone's admission will not erase sexism, it is an admission that he was wrong. I would like to think the emergence of Womanist Theology is partly the reason Cone saw the errors of his ways. It is my hope that other men, especially those who espouse sexist and patriarchal practices and benefit from patriarchal systems, would

⁷⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Fortieth Anniversary Edition*, xx.

⁷⁷ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Fortieth Anniversary Edition*, xx.

see the error of their ways and seek to rectify the errors. Cone's admission of errors shines with hope that change is possible.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter will interact with the discipline of sociology to answer questions that may aid in bringing liberation to women who are at times subjugated due to their gender and society's gendered roles. Sociology aligns with my project, entitled "Preaching Women Matter: Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That Affirm Preaching Women in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana and Beyond" because it allows me to investigate how women experience subordination and inequality in various facets of society, how religion perpetuates gender inequality, and solutions to gender inequality. More specifically, this paper will proceed by defining sociology, exploring pioneers in sociology and how their work impacts society, querying key theories in sociology, documenting key social movements in sociology and how these movements challenge systemic societal injustices and led to historical changes. It is my desire to analyze these movements for models that spur radical movements to challenge systemic injustices in religious spaces, particularly pulpits in Black Baptist churches.

Sociology is rooted in the Latin word *socius*, which means companion, and the Greek word *logos*.¹ Sociology emphasizes “human life is social life.”² E. Guy Talbott, in his essay, “The Relation Between Theology and Sociology,” makes the case that theology and sociology are both rooted in relationships. He writes, “Theology is the science of man’s relationship to God; sociology is the science of man’s relation to his fellow-men.”³ Rather than focus on individual behaviors, sociology take its cues from what James Henslin, in his book, *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach*, calls “the study of the recurring aspects of life in society.”⁴ Henslin continues that sociology is concerned with group membership and face-to-face interaction. Group membership, according to Henslin, garners the attention of structural sociologists, who study “how membership in a group such as religion, influences people’s behaviors and attitudes, such as how they vote, or perhaps how education affects their opinions on social issues.”⁵ Structural sociologists also study how people interact with social issues based upon age, gender, sex, occupation, race, ethnicity, or geography.

The second focus in sociology is how individuals interact with each other. Henslin maintains that sociologists in this area “focus on what people do when they are in the presence of one another. They observe their behavior, recording the interaction by

¹ Kathy S. Stolley, *The Basics of Sociology* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2005), 1.

² Stolley, *The Basics of Sociology*, 1.

³ E. Guy Talbott, “The Relation between Theology and Sociology,” in *The Biblical World*, ed. William Rainey Harper, Ernest DeWitt Burton, and Shailer Mathews (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1915), 162.

⁴ James M. Henslin, *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach, Sixth Edition* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 100.

⁵ Henslin, *Sociology*, 100.

taking notes or by using tape, video, film, or digitized technology. Other sociologists tap people's attitudes and behaviors more directly by interviewing them."⁶ The goal is to "draw conclusions about people's attitudes and what significantly affect their lives."⁷ There is no getting around humans interacting with each other in every facet of their lives. Stolley contends, "From the families we are born into, through school, work, and play; retirements; and even the gatherings that memorialize our deaths, we spend our lives within a tapestry woven of interlocking social arrangements."⁸ Even as humans share their lives, they also bring with them diverse ways of living, being, and doing. These differences may result in disagreements, conflict, and war.

Historical Pioneers in Sociology

French Philosopher Auguste Comte is considered the father of sociology. He preferred to call it social physics as a scientific means to study the "nature of the social universe created by people's behaviors, interactions, and patterns of social organizations."⁹ He preferred to use the term, social physics, because he "hoped that a mechanistic science could help to unravel society's complexities"¹⁰ However, he chooses to use sociology when another scholar "started using the term for his own brand of

⁶ Henslin, *Sociology*, 102.

⁷ Henslin, *Sociology*, 102.

⁸ Stolley, *The Basics of Sociology*, 1.

⁹ Jonathan H. Turner, *Theoretical Sociology: A Concise Introduction to Twelve Sociological Theories* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014), 1.

¹⁰ Alex Pentland, "Social Physics: How Good Ideas Spread – the Lessons from a New Science," <https://physicsworld.com/a/social-physics-and-antisocial-science/>.

mathematical social science.”¹¹ Comte maintains there are two fields of sociology. The first is social statics, which is the “study of the forces that hold society together,”¹² and social dynamics, “the study of the causes of social change.”¹³

Another pioneer in sociology is Emile Durkeim, whose concern is “primarily with order, consensus, solidarity, social morality and systems of religion.”¹⁴ He is the first to define sociology as an academic discipline. He argues, “sociologists should study particular features of collective group life and sociology is the study of social facts, things which are external to, and coercive of individuals. These social facts are features of the group, and cannot be studied apart from the collective, nor can they be derived from the study of individuals.”¹⁵

Meanwhile, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, a journalist, activist, and researcher was considered a sociologist, who vehemently spoke out against lynching in the nineteenth century. Long before Rosa L. Parks refused to relinquish her bus seat in the segregated South, Wells-Barnett refused to give up her seat on a train on May 4, 1891, “only to be dragged off by white men.”¹⁶ She led a charge against lynchings in the United States and does so by using statistics of lynching deaths published in white-owned newspapers.

¹¹ Pentland, <https://physicsworld.com/a/social-physics-and-antisocial-science/>.

¹² Ronald Fletcher, “Auguste Comte: French Philosopher,” <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Auguste-Comte>.

¹³ Fletcher, “Auguste Comte: French Philosopher.”

¹⁴ “Sociology of Emile Durkeim,” University of Regina Department of Sociology and Social Studies, <https://uregina.ca/~gingrich/250j1503.htm>.

¹⁵ “Sociology of Emile Durkeim,” University of Regina Department of Sociology and Social Studies, <https://uregina.ca/~gingrich/250j1503.htm>.

¹⁶ Jerry Mitchell, “History: Ida B. Wells refuses to give up seat,” *Clarion Ledger*, May 3, 2016, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/local/journeytojustice/2016/05/03/history-ida-b-wells-refuses-to-give-up-seat/83875088/>.

According to Stolley, Wells-Barnett once declared, “I felt that one had better die fighting against injustice than to die like a dog or a rat in a trap.”¹⁷ Wells-Barnett’s contribution to sociology is considered groundbreaking as she studied group behaviors, patterns, and injustices through racial lenses. Stolley states, “The creation of social theory viewed through race relations, her part in the long-overlooked analyses by African Americans, a focus on justice and morality, and a focus on the intersections of race, class and gender that has been central to modern feminist theory.”¹⁸

Sociological Theory That Speaks to Injustice, Power, Dominance: Karl Marx - Social Conflict Theory

Karl Heinrich Marx, a German philosopher, economist, historian, and sociologist, is credited for popularizing the Social Conflict Theory (SCT) in the social science arena. Marx contends that conflict is inevitable as “those in possession of wealth and resources will protect and hoard those resources while those without will do whatever they can to obtain them.”¹⁹ In essence the haves and the have nots will be in a perpetual state of conflict. Sociologist Ashley Crossman writes, “tensions and conflicts arise when resources, status, and power are unevenly distributed between groups and that these conflicts become the engine for social change.”²⁰ Marx’s theory asserts that those who

¹⁷ Stolley, *The Basics of Sociology*, 18.

¹⁸ Stolley, *The Basics of Sociology*, 17.

¹⁹ “Conflict Theory: The Never -Ending Competition for Resources,” <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/economics/conflict-theory/>.

²⁰ Ashley Crossman, “Understanding Conflict Theory,” July 31, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/conflict-theory-3026622>.

hold the power also control multiple facets of life, including politics, material resources, and social institutions.

Marx bases his Social Conflict Theory on “the causes and consequences of class conflict between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production and the capitalists) and the proletariat (the working class and the poor.)”²¹ He concludes that the minority powerful class is at odds with the majority oppressed class as the power and resources are in the hands of a few. “Marx reasoned that [as] the socio-economic conditions worsened for the proletariat, they would develop a class consciousness that revealed their exploitation at the hands of the wealthy capitalist class of bourgeoisie, and then they would revolt, demanding changes to smooth the conflict.”²² This power dynamics show up on Sunday mornings in Protestant churches that are filled with mostly women and children. A cursory examination of Sunday morning church attendees in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana, bears Marx’s assertion that being in the majority does not always lead to possession of power and authority. Often women make up the bulk of attendees and provide the bulk of donations.

Conflict theory suggests society is defined by a struggle for dominance among social groups that compete for scarce resources. “In the context of gender, conflict theory argues that gender is best understood as men attempting to maintain power and privilege to the detriment of women.”²³ In this structure, the dominant group is men, and the

²¹ Crossman, “Understanding Conflict Theory.”

²² Crossman, “Understanding Conflict Theory.”

²³ Debbie Holt, “The Conflict Theory,” in *Introduction to Women and Gender Studies*, ed. Debbie Holt, <https://viva.pressbooks.pub/hum210/chapter/gender-stratification-and-inequality-the-conflict-perspective/>.

subordinate group is women, as men have in most cases “historically held most of the world’s resources.”²⁴

There are four primary assumptions in modern conflict theory. They are:

- Competition, which suggests that competition is always present in every human relationship and interaction. “Competition rather than consensus is characteristic of human relationships.”²⁵
- Structural inequality, which speaks to the idea that “inequalities are built into all social structures. Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure strive to see it maintained.”²⁶
- Revolution, which contends that “change occurs as a result of conflict between social classes competing interests rather than through adaption.”²⁷
- War at times serves as a “unifier of the societies involved,”²⁸ while other time demolishing societies.

Of the four assumptions, structural inequality and revolution both have the propensity to effect change against systemic transgressions in the world’s social institutions. Structural inequality is defined as “a condition that arises out of attributing an unequal status to a category of people in relationship to one or more other categories of people, a relationship that is perpetuated and reinforced by a confluence of unequal relationships in roles, functions, decision rights, and opportunities.”²⁹ According to

²⁴ Holt, “The Conflict Theory.”

²⁵ *New World Encyclopedia*, “Conflict Theory,” www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/conflict_theory.

²⁶ *New World Encyclopedia*, “Conflict Theory,” www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/conflict_theory.

²⁷ *New World Encyclopedia*, “Conflict Theory,” www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/conflict_theory.

²⁸ *New World Encyclopedia*, “Conflict Theory,” www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/conflict_theory.

²⁹ Anis A. Dani and Arjan de Haan, *Inclusive States: Social Policy and Structural Inequalities* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2008), 3.

Kimberly Amadeo, structural inequality is “a system of privilege created by institutions within an economy. These institutions include the law, business practices, and government policies. They also include education, health care, and the media. They are powerful socializing agents that tell us what we can achieve within society.”³⁰ Amadeo suggests that structural inequalities are the result of policies and laws that are put in place and those policies and laws have “advantages for some and disadvantages for others. When the laws work against specific groups, inequality becomes part of the structure of the market.”³¹

An example of structural inequality is gender pay as women in 2020 earned “84% of what men earned, according to a Pew Research analysis of median hourly earnings of both full- and part-time workers. Based upon this estimate, it would take an extra 42 days of work for women to earn what men did in 2020.”³² As the pay gap begins to narrow and “women have increased their presence in higher-paying jobs traditionally dominated by men, such as professional and managerial positions, women as a whole continue to be overrepresented in lower-paying occupational relative to their share of the workforce.”³³ Equally so, women in ministry are paid less than their male counterparts. According to the Church Executive, “Data shows that salaries for female clergy start at lower levels

³⁰ Kimberly Amadeo, “What is Structural Inequality: How Structural Inequality Stifles the American Dream,” March 26, 2022, <https://www.thebalancemoney.com/structural-inequality-facts-types-causes-solution-4174727>.

³¹ Amadeo, “What is Structural Inequalities: How Structural Inequality Stifles the American Dream.”

³² Amanda Barroso and Anna Brown, “Gender pay gap in U.S. held steady in 2020,” *Pew Research Center*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/25/gender-pay-gap-facts/>.

³³ Barroso and Brown, “Gender pay gap in U.S. held steady in 2020.”

than men and the disparity is consistent over time. Additionally, male clergy are typically offered higher salary than female clergy for the same position.”³⁴

The second assumption in Conflict Theory involves revolutions, which the *Pocket Oxford American Dictionary* defines as a “forcible overthrow of a government or social order in favor of a new system.”³⁵ Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*, contends that overthrowing the government may be more advantageous than not. He writes, “Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have the world to win.”³⁶

While conflict is inevitable, a positive outcome is not inevitable because it depends on how much the oppressed is willing to struggle as the controlling faction controls the fight. Alan Maas, in his article, “Marx’s Theory of Working-Class Revolution,” writes, “As Marx described, all class societies produce a legal, political, and ideological ‘superstructure’ that operates to freeze the existing relations of production and protect the rulers from the ruled.”³⁷ For example, the rulers own the police that the ruled count on to protect them. Maas continues, “the outcome of the class struggle determines whether the society moves forward or backward. The victory of the class

³⁴ “Women, money and gender bias,” September 30, 2022, <https://churchexecutive.com/archives/church-financial-wellness-22>.

³⁵ *Pocket Oxford American Dictionary, Second Edition*, s.v. “Revolution” (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 709.

³⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group, 2018), 58.

³⁷ Alan Maass, “Marx’s Theory of Working-Class Revolution,” *International Socialist Organization*, October 14, 2020, <https://socialistworker.org/2010/10/14/marxs-theory-of-working-class-revolution>.

associated with the new productive forces is far from inevitable — in fact, there are many examples in history of its defeat, leading to stagnation or even regression.”

The outcome of social revolution is a change in social order and social structure. Jean-Pierre Reed contends, “Their outcomes, as, such are usually associated with the transition to modernity, the rise of capitalism, and the emergence of democracy.”³⁸ Reed, a sociology professor, posits that social revolutions are different from political revolutions. He writes, “Compared to political revolutions, which are typically orchestrated from above, social revolutions are mass based. Their root causes are structural in nature, and the processes associated with their mobilization typically involve cultural, psychological and political factors.”³⁹

Sociological Theory That Speaks to Women, Gender and Power: Mary Wollstonecraft - Feminist Theory

In many ways, Feminist Theory (FT) maintains the same arguments as Social Conflict Theory but does so through the lens of women. Feminist Theory “shines a light on special problems, trends, and issues that are otherwise overlooked or misidentified by the historical dominant male perspective within social theory.”⁴⁰ Social problems emanate when the dominate group exploit the subordinate group as when men oppress women. Marxist and Socialist feminists call this system of domination patriarchy. They make the case that “males have privilege and dominance of women, emerges as a result

³⁸ Jean-Pierre Reed, “Revolutions,” *Oxford Bibliographies*, January 15, 2015, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0115.xml>.

³⁹ Reed, “Revolutions.”

⁴⁰ Ashley Crossman, “Feminist Theory in Sociology,” <https://www.thoughtco.com/feminist-theory-3026624>.

of the men's ownership of and control over the economic resources of society."⁴¹

According to Marxist and Socialist feminists, "a challenge to patriarchy is the solution to women's subjugation."⁴²

To begin challenging the imbalance of power and to improve the status of women, Mary Wollstonecraft, as early as the 18th Century, introduced the Feminist Theory.

Wollstonecraft, an advocate of educational and social equality for women, in 1792, published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, "which calls for women and men to be educated equally."⁴³ In her book, Wollstonecraft writes:

Contending for the rights of woman, my argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she knew why she ought to be virtuous? Unless freedom strengthen her reason till she comprehend her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good? If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind; but the education and situation of woman, at present, shuts her out of from such investigations.⁴⁴

In summary, Wollstonecraft seems to suggest that the nation's wellbeing hinges on the wellbeing of women, who, if educated will lift not just women, but all humans. Hundreds of years later a collective of Black feminists argue, "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the

⁴¹ Vaso Thomas, "Conflict Perspective," in *Encyclopedia of Social Problems, Vol. 1*, ed. Vincent N. Parrillo (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2008), 57.

⁴² Thomas, "Conflict Perspective," 157.

⁴³ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Mary Wollstonecraft: English Author," <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Wollstonecraft>.

⁴⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of The Rights of Woman* (South Bend, IN: Informations Inc., 2000), 1, <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3314963>.

destruction of all systems of oppression.”⁴⁵ The idea of working for the good of the whole is in line with Womanist Theology, which encompasses justice for all, including men. Even as James Cone’s Liberation Theology did not recognize the needs of Black women, Womanist Theology does not distance itself from men. In fact, “Many black people today see the white feminist movement as an attempt to divide black people. Contemporary black feminists caution against espousing the more ‘radical’ white feminist stances because these stances leave out, as irrelevant, black men, black children, black families.”⁴⁶

Both statements speak to the heart of the Feminist Theory, which gained notoriety in the 1970s and 1980s “with the surge in scholar[ly] attention to the role of gender in shaping every aspect of the human experience.”⁴⁷ The goal of Feminist Theory is not to be inclusive of women and girls or to promote women over men. It is about “viewing the social world in a way that illuminates the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and injustice, and in doing so, promotes the pursuit of equality and justice.”⁴⁸ Feminist Theory analyzes ways discrimination is perpetuated based upon sex and gender. Some who work within the Feminist Theory focus on patriarchy, which is believed to be the reasons behind gender inequalities. Patriarchy is defined as “a form of social

⁴⁵ Adolph Reed, “The Combahee River Collective Statement,” https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition_Readings.pdf.

⁴⁶ R. Ruth Barton, “A Comparison and Contrast of Womanist and Feminist Theology and Experience,” Christians for Biblical Equality, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/comparison-and-contrast-womanist-and-feminist-theology-and/11>.

⁴⁷ Sara L. Ziegler, “Feminist Theory,” in *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*, <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1255/feminist-theory>.

⁴⁸ Ashley Crossman, “Feminist Theory in Sociology: An Overview of Key Ideas and Issues,” February 20, 2020, <https://www.thoughtco.com/feminist-theory-3026624>.

organization in which cultural and institutional beliefs and patterns accept, support, and reproduce the domination of women and younger men by older or more powerful men.”⁴⁹ Riane Eisler, in her book, *The Chalice and the Blade*, describes patriarchy as “the ranking of one half of humanity over the other.”⁵⁰ Gerda Lerner, a self-described feminist, contends that patriarchy is the “manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power.”⁵¹

Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as a “system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.”⁵² She further suggests there is private patriarchy and public patriarchy. Private patriarchy “is the oppression of women limiting them to unpaid household labor and keeping them from the public sphere.”⁵³ Conversely, public patriarchy allows women to work outside of the home, but public access “is seen as inferior compared with that of their male counterparts and women are still collectively subordinated by societal constructions.”⁵⁴

⁴⁹ “Patriarchy,” <http://sociology.iresearchnet.com/sociology-of-gender/patriarchy/>

⁵⁰ Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History and The Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1987), xvii.

⁵¹ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 239.

⁵² Sylvia Walby, “Theorising Patriarchy,” *Sociology* 23, no. 2 (May 1989): 214.

⁵³ Jessica Nicole Mitchell, “Power-control theory: An examination of private and public patriarchy,” Graduate theses and dissertations, University of South Florida, 2, <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3107&context=etd>.

⁵⁴ Mitchell, “Power-control theory: An examination of private and public patriarchy,” 2.

Walby maintains women's labor costs employers less than men's labor, which is why employers may often seek to hire women over men. This practice presents problems for men who fear losing control and power. Thus, the government steps in and sets policies to curtail such practices. As an example, Walby writes, "This century male workers again utilized the state to support their claims to privileged access to paid work in the legislation passed each war-time, at their urging, which gave legal backing to the men's demands that the women war-time workers be thrown out of their jobs at the end of the wars, so that they could be given to men."⁵⁵

Feminist theorists agree that "religious ideas were the foundation stones of the way that patriarchal culture regards women, and that womanhating religious nostrums underlay the sciences and literatures that men created."⁵⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, maintains that religion enslaves women. In her book, *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir maintains "it is to a man's total advantage to have God endorse the codes he creates: and specifically because he exercises sovereign authority over the woman, it is only right that this authority be conferred on him by the sovereign being."⁵⁷ An example of Beauvoir's view that men use religion to control is how biblical texts are interpreted to silence women. The most often used scripture is 1 Corinthians 14:34, which states, "Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also

⁵⁵ Walby, "Theorising Patriarchy," 216.

⁵⁶ Sheila Jeffreys, *Man's Dominion: The Rise of Religion and the Eclipse of Women's Right* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 16, *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=958221>.

⁵⁷ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2011), v. 1st, <https://search-ebscohost-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=745281&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

says” (NRSV). Paul’s statement seems to be in opposition to the ways Jesus went against culture to affirm women. In Susan Harris Howell’s book, *Buried Talents: Overcoming Gendered Socialization to Answer God’s Call*, Mimi Haddad writes in the foreword, “For Jesus, women’s value resides not in their cultural roles, but in their response to God’s revelation, and this becomes the standard for every member of Christ’s new covenant people. Women are now daughters of Abraham (Luke 13:16), a title first used by Jesus to welcome women as heirs and full members of Christ’s church.”⁵⁸

Radical Social Movements: Women’s Suffrage Movement

An example of the means to balance the powers among men and women is the Women’s Suffrage Movement, which brought about social change that allows women to vote. This protest was the impetus for the adoption and ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The Amendment states, “the rights of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”⁵⁹ Suffrage, according to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is “the right to vote in electing public officials and adopting or rejecting proposed legislation.”⁶⁰

The Women’s Suffrage Movement is born out of the idea that women **just** as men have a right to share in the political process. Jill Keppler, in her book, *Inside the*

⁵⁸ Susan Harris Howell, *Buried Talents: Overcoming Gendered Socialization to Answer God’s Call* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), xiii.

⁵⁹ Robin Bleiweis, “100 Years After the 19th Amendment, the Fight of Women’s Suffrage Continues,” August 18, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/100-years-19th-amendment-fight-womens-suffrage-continues/>.

⁶⁰ “Suffrage,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/suffrage>.

Women's Right's Movement, writes, "In the early days of the British colonies in North America, married women couldn't own property in their own name or have their own money (with very few exceptions). After the colonies became the United States, each of the original 13 states passed laws making sure that women didn't have suffrage, or the right to vote."⁶¹ Movement leaders Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, maintain the Constitution of the United States and their God-given rights, also call natural rights, qualify them to participate in the political process that ultimately determines what happens to them as individuals and citizens. Susan McCue, in her article, "The Constitution in Ideas of the Early Suffrage Movement," writes the following:

The small, but devoted band of suffragists, led by Stanton and Anthony, boldly stepped into the public arena waving an Enlightenment, natural-rights theory in one hand, and the Constitution in the other. Each hand perfectly complemented the other, for the Constitution proclaimed the enumerated body of rights they demanded, while the natural rights theory explained why women ought to have what was promised in the document. The joining of Constitutional restitution with natural rights theory was a masterpiece in pragmatic politics. The suffragists relied upon the Constitution simply because it was there. Suffragists pointed to the Supreme Law of the Land and noted that their [is] nothing new, nothing alien. They asked for that which was already theirs through Law and Nature.⁶²

According to Stanton, the only reason women were not equal and not able to contribute beyond their homes is because women "had been stunted."⁶³ Stanton argues, the Constitution as written is the remedy to women's unequal status to men. As a means of protest, Stanton emphasizes that women "must command the ability to reason for themselves and share in the political process. For these central tasks, women needed an

⁶¹ Jill Keppeler, *Inside the Women's Rights Movement* (New York, NY: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 2018), 6.

⁶² Susan McCue, "The Constitution in Ideas of the Early Suffrage Movement," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 3, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1975): 39.

⁶³ McCue, "The Constitution in Ideas of the Early Suffrage Movement," 39.

education and the vote. The ballot-box-in particularly, became the symbol for women's equality in the political realm."⁶⁴

Unhappy with the situation, Stanton, along with abolitionist Lucretia Mott, rallied women to fight for what rightfully belonged to them. Mott states, "Any great change must expect opposition, because it shakes the very foundation of privilege."⁶⁵ The first national meeting was in Seneca Falls, New York. Keppeler reports 200 people attended. Reminisce of the Declaration of Independence, Stanton read a document entitled, "Declaration of Sentiments," which states, "Because women do feel themselves . . . oppressed, and . . . deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States."⁶⁶ This first step led to the 19th Amendment, which changed the course of history.

Though women gained the right to vote, the effects of the Women's Suffrage Movement more than 100 years later continue to positively impact women in the United States. Yet, Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Ruth Igielnik, in their article, "A Century After Women Gained the Right to Vote, Majority of Americans See Work to Do on Gender Equality," posit, "A majority of U.S. adults say the country hasn't gone far enough when it comes to giving women equal rights with men, even as a large share

⁶⁴ McCue, "The Constitution in Ideas of the Early Suffrage Movement," 39.

⁶⁵ Keppeler, *Inside the Women's Rights Movement*, 6.

⁶⁶ Keppeler, *Inside the Women's Rights Movement*, 8.

thinks there has been progress in the last decade, according to a new Pew Research Center survey.”⁶⁷ Other findings of the study show the following:

- More cite women’s suffrage than other milestones as the most important in advancing the position of women in the U.S.
- A majority of Americans say feminism has had a positive impact on the lives of white, Black, and Hispanic women.
- About four-in-ten Republican men think women’s gains have come at the expense of men.
- Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say that, when it comes to gender discrimination, the bigger problem is discrimination being overlooked.
- **Most Americans favor adding the ERA to the U.S. Constitution, even as many don’t think this would make much difference for women’s rights.**
- About three-in-ten U.S. men think women’s gains have come at the expense of men.⁶⁸

Radical Movements Steeped in Sociology: Montgomery Bus Boycott

Like the Women’s Suffrage Movement, the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56 is a social protest movement against the injustices and unequal treatment of Blacks in the United States of America, specifically in the South. Timothy Shands, in his dissertation, “The Anatomy of a Social Movement: The Least Publicized Aspects of the Montgomery Alabama Bus Boycott,” writes, “In addition to being symptomatic of a stifling tradition

⁶⁷ Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Ruth Igielnik, “A Century After Women Gained the Right to Vote, Majority of Americans See Work to Do on Gender Equality,” *Pew Research Center*, July 7, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/07/a-century-after-women-gained-the-right-to-vote-majority-of-americans-see-work-to-do-on-gender-equality/>.

⁶⁸ Horowitz and Igielnik, “A Century After Women Gained the Right to Vote, Majority of Americans See Work to Do on Gender Equality,” <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/07/a-century-after-women-gained-the-right-to-vote-majority-of-americans-see-work-to-do-on-gender-equality/>.

of bigotry and social injustice throughout the South, it was a caste system intent on keeping Black citizens throughout the nation in a ‘social, political, and economic cellar.’⁶⁹ This racial segregation permeated through every facet of society including the municipal bus transportation system in Montgomery, Alabama. Shands writes, “Racial segregation and unfair seating practices on municipal buses, and other forms of public transportation, had long been a source of aggravation, discomfiture, embarrassment, and disputation among black residents throughout the South”⁷⁰ On December 1, 1955, Rosa L. Parks, unknowingly sparked a social movement when she refused to adhere to a white bus driver’s demands that she give up her seat to a white citizen and move to the back of the bus. Parks’ actions “set into motion a historical chain of events that successfully challenged the social injustice.”⁷¹ Parks’ arrest spurred the organizing of the boycott with the first meeting held on December 4, 1955, at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Calling for a boycott, E. D. Nixon, a local leader, states, “It’s the only way to make the white folk see that we would not take this sort of thing any longer.”⁷² Both men and women joined forces by refusing to use public transportation. Instead, the Montgomery Improvement Association galvanized 45,000 community members to help each other to get to and from work with the use of carpools.

⁶⁹ Timothy Shands, “The Anatomy of a Social Movement: The Least Publicized Aspects of the Montgomery Alabama Bus Boycott,” City College of New York, 2016, 1, https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc_etds_theses/618/.

⁷⁰ Shands, “The Anatomy of a Social Movement: The Least Publicized Aspects of the Montgomery Alabama Bus Boycott,” 1.

⁷¹ Shands, “The Anatomy of a Social Movement: The Least Publicized Aspects of the Montgomery Alabama Bus Boycott,” 1.

⁷² Adeniyi A. Coker, “Montgomery Bus Boycott,” in *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, ed. Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 339.

After four failed attempts to force the end of the boycott, “It was clear that the white establishment was getting desperate.”⁷³ Feeling the economic impact of the boycott, “store owners formed a group called the Men of Montgomery in reaction to the boycott. The aim of the group was to negotiate a way to end the boycott — not for moral reasons, not to end segregation, but to keep their profits from evaporating. Their negotiations never really led to any outcomes.”⁷⁴ Several local and state appeal rulings ended with a federal ruling on June 4, 1956, when the “U.S. district court ruled 2 to 1 that racial segregation on the Montgomery city bus lines is unconstitutional.”⁷⁵ The City of Montgomery appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which held firm the federal district court’s ruling and “declared unconstitutional Alabama’s state and local segregation laws.”⁷⁶ Finally, on December 21, 1956, racial segregation ended in Alabama. “African Americans returned to the city buses, but not without a price and future anguish.”⁷⁷

Sociology, Structural Inequalities, and the Church

Given Karl Marx’ Social Conflict Theory’s stance that power often rests in the hands of a few who makes rules that affects the majority, there appears to be a direct correlation in religious institutions. Often men, while in a minority position, dominate women, who are the majority. For example, in Black Baptist churches, women are “50-

⁷³ Coker, “Montgomery Bus Boycott,” 340.

⁷⁴ Coker, “Montgomery Bus Boycott,” 340.

⁷⁵ Coker, “Montgomery Bus Boycott,” 340.

⁷⁶ Coker, “Montgomery Bus Boycott,” 340.

⁷⁷ Coker, “Montgomery Bus Boycott,” 341.

75% of church members, but less than 10% of church leadership and perhaps 1% of pastors.”⁷⁸

Specifically in the Black church, women are major participants and are often the reasons for the church’s success. However, TeResa Green suggests, “Despite the significance of women to the existence of the church, the position of preacher and pastor continues to be male dominated and is not generally accessible to African American women.”⁷⁹ Structural inequalities exist as some within the Black church has adopted policies and doctrine that perpetuate male leadership and “congregations are expected to embrace the secular view of appropriateness of the dominate position of males in American society.”

Another example of structural inequality regarding women clergy is in the way the church’s sanctuary is designed. Roxanne Mountford’s makes the case in her book, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*. Mountford writes, “At the most fundamental level, architects design spaces for the male body. Women whose bodies are smaller on the whole than men’s are often dwarfed profoundly; church buildings themselves have a history written in stone and the soul imagination that reminds even a casual passerby of the masculine authorities who dwell within.”⁸⁰ The seat of power in the church is the pulpit, the “embodiment of clerical authority.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ “State of Clergywomen in the US: A Statistical Update 2018,” 8.

⁷⁹ TeResa Green, “A Gendered Spirit: Race, Class, and Sex in the African American Church,” *Race, Gender & Class* 10, no. 1 (2003): 116.

⁸⁰ Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 3.

⁸¹ Green, *The Gendered Pulpit*, 17.

When preaching women are pushed to the margins, they often find pulpits outside of the institutional church. Some female novelists such as George Eliot, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker create characters as women preachers, who push gendered religious norms to preach. Eliot, the pen name for English woman Mary Ann Evans, creates Dinah Morris, who without ordination, preaches on her pulpit, “a cart drawn up under a maple tree.”⁸² The horse cart represents the strength of rural farmers and laborers. Likewise, Morrison, in her novel, *Beloved*, situates Baby Sugg “outside the four-square walls of institutionalized churches in a secluded place called the Clearing, ‘a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place.’ There she was ‘followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through.’”⁸³

Much like the characters, Dinah Harris and Baby Suggs, many contemporary preaching women create and find pulpits outside of the institutional church, where Black women have “historically been excluded from the decision-making tables. It is men who have served in leadership roles and have chosen other men to be their successors and to serve alongside them.”⁸⁴ In a revolutionary protest against the Church’s structural inequalities, Dr. Melva Sampson, an ordained Baptist preacher, creates *Pink Robe Chronicles* as a “digital brush harbor that circumvents interlaced oppressive religious structures, doctrines, and theologies by utilizing womanist and Afrocentric/Afrofuturist

⁸² Green, *The Gendered Pulpit*, 18.

⁸³ Green, *The Gendered Pulpit*, 19-20.

⁸⁴ Deidre “Jonese” Austin, “A Reflection on the State of Women’s Equality in the Black Baptist Church Context,” December 5, 2021, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/reflection-state-womens-equality-black-baptist-church/>.

values of resistance, recovery and reflection to curate liberated and transformative faith-centered communities of practice.”⁸⁵ On Sundays, Black women gather in a digital Clearing to engage in religious and spiritual traditions and sacred practices.

In October 2022, the Smithsonian National Museum for African American History and Culture brought Pink Robe Chronicles artifacts and sermons into a museum collection. Teddy Reeves, curator of Religion at the Smithsonian’s NMAAHC, states the following:

As a curator Pink Robe Chronicles shows the use of technology and innovation in the digital space where a digital community/digital hush harbor is created to process, engage, worship, call forth and conjure all without physical location. This is the beginning of something new. It was important for us to collect this oral history, collect Pink Robe Chronicles and collect around Melva Sampson because she is breaking new ground and doing work that Black women and queer individuals are tilling in the digital realm.⁸⁶

Despite gendered roles, structural inequalities, and patriarchy, women continue to do the work of ministry as preachers and pastors. For example, the Rev. Dr. Danielle L. Brown was “elected as the first woman senior pastor (the tenth senior pastor) of Shiloh Baptist Church in Plainfield, New Jersey.”⁸⁷ Five days later, the Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart “became the first woman chosen to serve in the highest role of a Black Baptist denomination when she was elected as the president of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Society.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ “Celebrating and Centering Black Women in Ministry Through Digital Black Religion, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship,” Black Theology Project, <https://btpbase.org/celebrating-and-centering-black-women-in-ministry-through-digital-black-religion/>.

⁸⁶ “Celebrating and Centering Black Women in Ministry Through Digital Black Religion, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship,” Black Theology Project, <https://btpbase.org/celebrating-and-centering-black-women-in-ministry-through-digital-black-religion/>.

⁸⁷ Austin, “A Reflection on the State of Women’s Equality in the Black Baptist Church Context.”

⁸⁸ Austin, “A Reflection on the State of Women’s Equality in the Black Baptist Church Context.”

Conclusion

Throughout this document, I sought to demonstrate how humans relate to each other in society's institutions and how religious institutions mimic secular institutions regarding power dynamics and gender. As stated in the introduction, my goal was to analyze Sociology and its theories — particularly, Karl Marx's Social Conflict Theory as it relates to my doctoral thesis "Preaching Women Matter: Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That Affirm Preaching Women in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana and Beyond." The theory assumes that conflict is perpetual, structural inequalities exist, and changes come when the oppressed revolt against the systems and practices that seek to keep them in their places. Through this research I'm reminded of 19th Century preaching women like Jarena Lee, Zilpha Law, and Julia Foote, each of whom prevailed through rejection and patriarchal systems that sought to silence them. These preaching women each engages in peaceful protests by challenging systems that sought to keep them in their gendered roles.

For example, Lee announces to the Rev. Richard Allen, who would later establish the African Methodist Episcopal Church, that she senses God calling her to preach. He rejects her call on the grounds that church polity did not recognize preaching women. In protest, she asks, "Did not Mary first preach the risen Savior, and is not the doctrine of the resurrection the very climax of Christianity — hangs not all of our hope on this, as argued by St. Paul? Then did not Mary, a woman, preach the gospel? For she preached

the resurrection of the crucified Son of God.”⁸⁹ Lee did not waver in her quest to preach the Gospel. The African Methodist Episcopal Church recognized Lee as a preaching woman and ordained her April 6, 2016. Under the leadership of John Bryant, senior bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church’s Council of Bishops, Jarena Lee was recognized and the church decided to ordain her “posthumously during the 50th Quadrennial Session of the General Conference.”⁹⁰ Lee modeled what it means to push past systems, gendered norms, and patriarchy; and because she did, I am able to withstand prohibitions, polity, and patriarchy to preach with power.

Marx contends that conflict is inevitable and perpetual as the powerful elite fights hard to maintain control while the oppressed fights to free themselves. To this end, I am wondering if those who oppose women’s call to preach in the name of Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 14:34 that women are to be silent in the church has more to do with power rather than theology. Perhaps, it is a means to keep women in their places for fear of losing control. Dr. C. J. Rhodes, in a recent conversation, “Patriarchy in the Church,” hosted by Jude 3 Project, intimates keeping women out of the pulpit is a power move. He states, “I recently remember hearing conversations recently of older Black men, who say, ‘my issue with women in the ministry isn’t necessarily biblical or theological. (It’s) that

⁸⁹ Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Printed and Published for the Author, 1849), 11.

⁹⁰ World Methodist Council, “African Methodist Episcopal Church Posthumously Ordains Woman Preacher,” <http://firstfridayletter.worldmethodistcouncil.org/2016/04/african-methodist-episcopal-church-posthumously-ordainsfirst-womp/>.

the pulpit is the only and last place I can be somebody and if (women) are in, they're going to take the last place too.”⁹¹

It is my hope that this research and my final project stirs up women, who have been called to preach and experience rejection because of their gender. I hope that both women and men will first realize that struggle and conflict are inevitable in society. My prayer is that women are intentional in fulfilling their God-ordained call with or without the support of those in control. Lastly, it is my hope that women find ways to not only circumvent structure inequalities, systems, and practices that seek to silence them, but one day dismantle them.

⁹¹ C. J. Rhodes, “Patriarchy in Church,” in *Courageous Conversations 2021*, Jude 3 Project, video panel, August 18, 2021, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=1uEBhw6gfWY&t=1786s>.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

When I first contemplated this program, I was adamant that I would pursue a project regarding pastoral care and chaplaincy. However, my passion for giving voice to preaching women, who face patriarchal systems and practices, dominated my Spiritual Autobiography. With constructive feedback from my mentor, faculty consultant, and peers, I forged ahead to birth a research project entitled, “Preaching Women Matter: Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That Affirm Preaching Women in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana and Beyond.” I chose to include the word “beyond” in the title to allow women outside of the targeted context to participate because patriarchal systems and practices are not confined to a geographic location.

This project was designed to raise awareness of patriarchal systems and practices that silence the voices of women and to provide models to navigate such systems and practices. The hypothesis is that “if participants engage in a six-week training program, then they will recognize patriarchal systems and practices that silence the voices of women called to preach and discover models to circumvent those obstacles.” My hypothesis liberates women to fulfill their God-ordained assignment to preach the good news of Jesus, the Christ. The project allowed women to reimagine the biblical texts that are used to silence women, to view themselves as also made in the image of God, to use

their voices to speak up for themselves, and to seek out communities of support from like-minded women.

As evident in my *Spiritual Autobiography*, my personal journey as an ordained Black Baptist preaching woman has been filled with struggles and successes even as I have had to navigate patriarchal systems and practices that seek to devalue, dehumanize, and demonize my call to preach. Much of the rejection emanates from biblical texts that are primarily used to justify the ways many men view and treat women in the Black Baptist church. Patriarchy is an aged-old practice that is felt, seen, and heard throughout every fabric of society and it is unlikely that it will ever be eradicated. Still, there are strategies and models that preaching women may employ to pursue and to succeed.

The target context for this project is Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana, a geographic region of Alexandria, Louisiana. In my estimation, there are at least thirty Black Baptist churches in this targeted area — many of which do not recognize or affirm preaching women. In this area, there is only one Black Baptist church led by a woman. However, since beginning this doctoral process, one church, for the first time in its 123-year history, embraced women in the pulpit. Still, a cursory examination of the virtual Sunday morning worship services in many of these churches indicates there are more women in attendance, while men dominate church-wide offices of pastor and deacon. The current landscape of church attendance continually reflects the historical record that Black women make up the majority and generally are the most faithful in attendance and financial support. Yet, to my dismay and based upon my experience, even as women are the majority, I have heard my share of sexist pulpit jokes and negligent sexist sermon illustrations without any regard of the effects on the women in the pews.

Almost 200 years after the birth of the Black church, it is disheartening to witness the religious institution that was born out of oppression in many ways has become the oppressor in the ways the Black church often treats women as second-class citizens. Yet, just as Black women in the eighteenth century broke through denominational lines and barriers, so must Black women in the twenty-first century. Often, change only comes through means of struggle and protest as those who hold the power seek to maintain it through any means necessary. Women, specifically Black Baptist women, must resist being silent and subservient while being willing to engage in conflict to call out patriarchal systems and practices and to effect positive change.

Meanwhile, throughout the six-week project, Black Baptist women engaged in a safe environment, where professionally trained facilitators led empowerment sessions that allowed participants to reimagine themselves, speak up for themselves and to reassess biblical texts that are used to keep them in their places. Likewise, the training sessions provided women with a supportive community that valued their voices, strengthened their resolve, and empowered them to pursue their God-ordained assignment.

Methodology

Since preaching my first sermon in May 2003, I have spoken with countless women about my struggles to accept my call to preach, the loss of denominational relationships, and the patriarchal systems and practices I continue to face as an ordained Baptist preacher. Likewise, I have shared my resolve to continue the work of liberation for those women who want to move forward in ministry. I have discovered that my experiences are not isolated as women who attend Black Baptist churches in Southeast

Alexandria, Louisiana, told similar stories. As I contemplated this project, the question of whether women would willingly and freely participate to share their stories was a major concern. To assess the viability of participation, it was important to talk to influential women, who had an intimate pulse on the women in the community. One of the women is a pastor's wife, who works with many of the women in Baptist churches in the targeted area. In previous conversations, she has shared with me of her call to preach and that she is not able to fully accept her call to preach because of her husband's rejection. I also talked to another woman, who is well known and sought after to speak at women's events in Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana, and beyond. In previous conversations, she has shared with me that she has not acknowledged her call to preach because she does not want the struggles of preaching women. I chose to allow the women to recruit participants because I believed other women in the community would be more likely to participate if they knew others they trusted me and my work. Both women agreed to participate and to actively recruit other women to participate in the project.

In an initial meeting held on August 29, 2023, via Zoom, I explained the goal of the project, the methodology to obtain data, weekly training topics, and the names of the professional facilitators. I assured the women that the project, their participation, and their stories would be confidential. Eligible participants should be Black women, who are at least eighteen-years old and who attend Black Baptist churches. During this initial call, we also discussed potential participants and decided that the women would make initial contact with other women. I then called those women who expressed interest in wanting more information or who were certain they wanted to participate. Of the initial contacts, one declined due to not being able to commit to six weeks and another, after stating that

she would participate, did not return the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix A). To my excitement, ten women agreed to participate by returning the necessary documents. Each woman received a flyer outlining the schedule, weekly topics, and weekly facilitators and an official welcome letter (Appendix B).

To measure the hypothesis, the qualitative analysis method was used. To collect data, each participant received via email pre- and post-project surveys (see Appendix C and D) that were designed as fillable Pdfs and personal journals (see Appendix E). The project implementation consisted of six weekly sessions held via Zoom. To ensure confidentiality, each participant chose a number that only the participant and the researcher knew.

Questions for the Pre- and Post-Project Survey included:

1. How do you define patriarchy?
2. How do you define liberation?
3. List ways you have experienced patriarchy?
4. Name historical or political acts or practices that oppress women in the home, church, community, or workplace.
5. List activities or roles that are suitable for women in the church.
6. Name biblical texts that appear to prohibit women preachers and pastors.

The surveys were created in Adobe Acrobat in a Portable Document Format or PDF, that allowed participants to record their answers directly in the document.

Participants returned the pre-project survey via email before the start of the first session.

Participants granted me, as the researcher, permission to record the weekly sessions as a means for participants to review sessions and for data collection. As the researcher, I also

provided information regarding the security of recorded responses for a total of five years. Afterwards, all documents would be destroyed via a shredder and all audio and video files will be securely scrubbed and reformatted by a sourced informational technology professional.

Workshop Presenters

While reflecting on potential topics for the project, it became evident that the four foundational chapters would also serve as the catalyst for workshop topics. Once the topics were solidified, I immediately knew the names of women whom I would ask to facilitate the sessions. The official name of the six-week training program is “A Pathway to Liberation Empowerment Program.” Because of the nature of the project, it was important that women serve as facilitators. One reason is that I believed the participants needed to hear from professional clergy women, who were confident in their calling and their expertise areas. Secondly, it was important to create an atmosphere where participants would feel safe to share their stories and experiences without a male presence. To this end, all women served as facilitators. Each facilitator readily accepted the invitation to present during the six-week project and expressed strong beliefs in my doctoral project. Three of the presenters also served as my professional associates.

The workshop presenters and their topics in the “A Pathway to Liberation Empowerment Program” were:

- Dr. Mary W. Moss of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is the pastor of St. Alma Baptist Church in Lakeland, Louisiana. She has a Doctor of Ministry degree from Beeson School of Divinity - Samford University. Her topic for week one was

“The State of Women in Ministry.” This session focused on Dr. Moss’ personal journey as a preaching woman. She also centered the struggles and successes of women, who face patriarchy in the pew, pulpit, and public spaces.

- Rev. Sherri L. Jackson of New Orleans, Louisiana. I am the primary researcher for this project. I have a Master of Divinity degree from United Theological Seminary. I am an author of several books, including *Silent Not Me: Reimagining the Biblical Text That Keeps Women Out of the Pulpit*. Additionally, I am a board-certified chaplain with a specialty in hospice and palliative care. My topic for week two was “Should Women Be Silent in the Church?” This session focused on 1 Corinthians 14:34, the biblical text that is often used to silence the voices of women in the church.
- Dr. Irie Lynne Session of Dallas, Texas. She is the co-pastor of The Gathering, A Womanist Church. She has a Doctor of Ministry degree from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. Her topic for week three was “Who Told You That? A Theological Case for Preaching Women.” Her focus was on Womanist Theology. She introduced to participants the concept of womanism and how to read the biblical text through a womanist lens that centers on women.
- Dr. Jamie Eaddy Chism of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is an adjunct instructor and mentor at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, where she also received her Doctor of Ministry degree. Her topic for week four was “Oppression, Privilege, and Spiritual Malpractice.” She took a historical approach by looking at preaching women of the 19th Century and how they navigated patriarchy.

- Dr. Cassandra Gould of Washington, D.C. She is an associate minister at Metropolitan A.M.E. Church and senior strategist at the Faith in Action National Network. She has a Doctor of Ministry degree from United Theological Seminary. Her topic for week five was “A Sociological Case for Preaching Women: Gender, Power & the Pulpit.” She focused on gender and power dynamics and historically how change in power often comes through conflict.
- The final session was used to provide an overview of the presentations and to answer any questions that may have arisen about the sessions. Individual interviews were also held during this week.

Each session began with prayer and announcements that reminded participants about the need to complete their journal entries. I also reminded participants that they were in a safe environment that allows them to share their stories and offer comments without fear of judgement. Participants were asked to remain on camera as a means of accountability.

Project Implementation Plan

The project began on September 14, 2023 and ended on October 19, 2023. This time frame was chosen to coincide with Clergy Appreciation Month observed during the month of October. Each session began at 6 p.m. CST weekly for six weeks. All sessions were held via Zoom. Each session began with a prayer, review of the rules of engagement, and followed by an introduction of the guest facilitator.

Preliminary activities included the following:

- The initial process of recruitment began the week of June 25 with a telephone call to two of the contextual associates. During this conversation I provided an overview of the project, the expectations, and the risks involved. Both women agreed to assist in identifying women who meet the selection criteria and who would likely participate in the program.
- On August 12, 2023, each facilitator was confirmed to present. They received their topics and information about the project and the targeted context. They also received copies of the pre- and post-Project survey questions to ensure their presentations were aligned with the questions.
- The initial two contextual associates contacted potential participants and provided them with an overview of the program. Once participants identified that they would participate, I contacted them to provide further details concerning the program, the need to sign an Informed Consent Form, the expectations, and the risks involved.
- On September 3, 2023, each woman received the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix A) via email and a program flyer outlining the topics and the speakers. The deadline to submit the signed form was before the start of the first session. Once they were returned, each woman received a welcome letter (see Appendix C) pre-project survey (see Appendix C) and an electronic journal. (see Appendix E). They also received the official Zoom invite that included the passcode.
- Before each session, participants received a reminder email of the week's presentation and a Zoom invite.

- Following each presentation, participants received a private, unlisted link that navigated to a copy of the video presentation. Only participants, who had the link were able to access the presentation. The presentations were recorded so that participants could review if needed and for those who were absent for the live presentation.

Implementation

The foundation for this project is my spiritual journey and pathway to accepting my call to ordained ministry and the patriarchal practices and systems that continually seek to silence me. Thus, the first session began with me sharing my story and why this project is important to me and countless women, who have been called to preach but struggle to answer the call. Participants received information about the individual chapters in my research project, an explanation of how they are related, and how they serve as the catalyst for the presentations. For example, during the second session, I led a conversation that analyzed 1 Corinthians 14:34, which is often used to reject a woman's called to preach. This scripture was the basis for my Biblical Foundations chapter and allowed me to carefully analyze it by primarily asking why the Apostle Paul commanded women to remain silent and the context in which he was speaking. Several of the participants mentioned they were familiar with 1 Corinthians 14:34 as a scripture used to silence women in the church.

Likewise, to inform the participants that preaching women in the twenty-first century are not the first to experience rejection, I chose to focus on the rise of Black preaching women in the nineteenth century. Through the stories of Jarena Lee, Zilpha

Elaw, and Julia Foote, I sought to explore not only their struggles but the ways they navigated patriarchal systems and practices in their religious denominations, local churches, and society. My choice for my Theological Foundations chapter was Womanist Theology as it centers Black women and their voices, their needs, and their strengths. Finally, my choice for the Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter was sociology's Social Conflict Theory, which speaks to the idea that power in the hands of a few is not easily or readily released without conflict.

Following the explanation of my doctoral research thus far, I also explained the Internal Review Board (IRB)'s process that governs the way that I approach the research, the security of data, and the integrity of the research. All participants voiced understanding of the process and stated that they were eager to begin. Though many of the participants knew each other from social and religious communities, I emphasized the importance of each participant commitment to confidentiality so that each woman could share without constraints or judgement. Finally, I assured participants that the goal of this research project and the training sessions was to provide them with models of what it means to use their voices and to fulfill their God-ordained assignments.

The six-week project began on Thursday, September 14, 2023, with the final session on October 19, 2023. Each session began at 6:00 p.m. CST with a scheduled ending time of 7:30 p.m. However, sessions lasted longer as the women were fully engaged with the presenters. Each session was held via Zoom and began with prayer, rules of engagement, introduction of facilitator, presentation, question-and-answer session, and closing prayer. The study began with ten participants with three leaving the project for various reasons, including schedule conflicts. Because the women left at

various times in the process, time constraints did not allow me to seek out additional participants. Of the three participants who unable to complete the project, I maintain contact with them through my social media platforms that offer support to women in ministry. Additionally, they will be invited to participate in any future training programs that I may offer.

Only women, who were at least eighteen-years old, were eligible to participate. All women attended Black Baptist churches, with four of the women being members of churches within the target area. Two participants lived in another state, and two others lived in Alexandria but attend Baptist churches outside of the target area. Of the participants, there were three ministers, two wives of pastors, one Sunday school teacher and another who leads a prayer ministry. Men were not allowed to participate so that women would be free to share their stories regarding patriarchy in their local churches and communities.

Each participant chose a number as a means of identification throughout this study. Following are the participants, their identifiable numbers, and education levels:

- Number 1: High school graduate with some additional training from a church Bible school, Sunday school teacher.
- Number 3: High school graduate, pastor's wife.
- Number 5: College graduate with a bachelor's degree, minister.
- Number 7: Master of Divinity second year student, pastor's wife, discipleship training teacher.
- Number 11: Associate degree, evangelist.
- Number 12: College graduate with a bachelor's degree, ordained minister, assistant pastor.

- Number 1022: College graduate with a master's degree, speaker, prayer ministry leader.

As previously mentioned, five sessions were held with qualified facilitators, each chosen because of her expertise and compassion for Black women in general and specifically Black preaching women.

Week One: Introduction, State of Preaching Women

Before the start of each session, participants received an email that included the Zoom login information and a reminder of the topic of discussion. Each participant was admitted in the virtual space individually to keep attendance. Workshops began promptly at 6 p.m. CST. During the first session, I formally welcomed participants into this project and introduced myself as the primary researcher. I provided an overview of the project, why I chose this project, why I chose Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana, as the focus context, and how this project fits into my overall doctoral journey. Ten women participated in the first session.

Though participants received and signed an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix A) during the first session, I emphasized that their participation was voluntary and confidential. To further assure them of the security of their written documentation and audio, I read how the IRB process governed how data would be secured and destroyed after a period of five years. Finally, I reiterated the data collection methods and how to complete the electronic journals, while encouraging participants to engage their journals following each session as a means of capturing their initial thoughts, feelings, and opinions regarding the subject matter. The presentation began with me introducing a three-minute video entitled, “Unladylike,” an introductory companion to the book, *Unladylike: Resisting the Injustice of Inequality in the Church*, by Pam Hogeweide. This

video presentation set the tone for not only the first session but for the entire six-week program.

The facilitator, Dr. Mary W. Moss, named her session “The State of Preaching Women.” She intentionally introduced herself as female, Baptist, preacher, and pastor and asked each participant to introduce herself. The facilitator emphasized that despite oppression and patriarchal systems and practices, women must be confident in who they are and what God has called them to do. Additionally, the facilitator provided the participants with common challenges to women, specifically preaching women. The challenges included misinterpretation of scriptures, tradition, other women, patriarchal systems, and oppressed women becoming the oppressor. She was deliberate in providing an exegetical approach to scriptures used to silence women in religious spaces. The scriptures provided were Jeremiah 1:4-5, Acts 2:17, Jeremiah 3:18, and Galatians 3:28.

Finally, during week one, each participant was fully engaged with the presenter by sharing their individual stories. Some of those comments included the following:

- “I’m overjoyed to hear of your journey. I’ve been on this journey a long time. I tried to get in one seminary to be told it’s only for men. God guides you. There are always other ways to adhere to God rather than being oppressed by others. As long as they say you can’t, I’m gonna try hard to do.”
- “I wanted to shout listening tonight. It seems it’s always something we women have to do to prove ourselves to be what God called us to do. I have confidence now because I know what God called me to do. That’s

why I started my ministry, Pearls of Wisdom. Every Sunday evening on Facebook, I drop pearls to those listening.”

- “When I told my pastor that I was called to ministry, he flipped me off and sent me out to work with the children. I started school myself because I know what God said to me. Some of these guys look at me crazy.”

This session lasted almost two hours because of the positive interaction with the presenter. Participants were reminded to complete their journal entries. We ended the session in prayer.

Week Two: Should Women Be Silent?

Prior to the start of week two, one participant notified me that she could no longer participate due to a schedule conflict. Another notified me that she was sick and could not participate in this session. Eight women participated in this session. The Zoom session was recorded to allow those absent to review the session via video. The session began with prayer and a review of the community rules of engagement with time allotted for any questions. The women were also reminded of the importance of completing their journals each week following the session.

The focus of the second session was based upon the Biblical Foundations chapter that analyzed 1 Corinthians 14:34. As previously mentioned, I served as the facilitator with the topic, “Should Women Be Silent?” The goal was to allow participants to see the often-used scripture in context of a broader pericope — 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. We also discussed other scriptures that are often used out of context and how doing so is a

dangerous practice for those who preach or teach scriptures that were written thousands of years ago in a world vastly different from the Western world.

Once again, participants were fully engaged in the conversation. Following are a few of the comments the women made:

- “Paul wrote to his audience in ways that they could understand. People need to understand these are Paul’s words. The words are not in red, so we know Jesus didn’t say them. These were Paul’s words that do not apply to women today.”
- “We are reading someone else’s mail. That’s why we have to dig deeper. We have to get to the context.”
- “You gave me more context to some of what I knew. You added to it. I really enjoyed this tonight.”

The session ended with prayer and another reminder for participants to complete their journal entries while the information was fresh on their minds.

Week Three: Who Told You That?

The scheduled facilitator was unable to present during week three resulting in me asking the facilitator for week four to switch weeks if her schedule allowed. She agreed resulting in week three’s focus being Womanist Theology, which is aligned with the Theological Foundation’s chapter of this paper. Four women attended the session. Three were absent and listened to the recording after the session. The facilitator, Dr. Irie Lynne Session, began by asking each participant to introduce herself, name how she would like to be addressed, and to state when the first time she heard a woman preach and what did she think about it. While the women did not remember the first time they heard a woman

preach, all remembered that it was probably during a women's only event that was held in the church's fellowship hall that did not involve a pulpit.

The facilitator led participants in a discussion about biblical interpretation that is often steeped in male pastors' theology that tells them that women are intrinsically inferior and subordinate to men. Thus, there is a need for women, especially Black women, to engage the biblical text with a lens that centers on marginalized women and uplifts women rather than debase them. As an example, the facilitator used the story of Samson and Delilah in Judges 16:4-22. She asked the participants what they had learned about Samson and Delilah. Of Samson, answers included, "his strength was in his hair," and "he was weak for a woman." This brings about how "women are deceptive and can't be trusted." Of Delilah, answers included, "she tricked Samson," "she got him to tell his secrets," "she used her sensuality and sexuality to convince him to cut his hair."

One of the participants read Judges 16:4-22 as the other participants were asked to write in the chat where they saw or heard that Delilah used her feminine wiles to trick Samson. None of the participants wrote in the chat that they heard or seen anywhere in the text that Delilah seduced or tricked Samson because it is not in the text. The facilitator then emphasized that it is important for women to preach and to have a lens for which to engage scripture without a patriarchal lens. She then asked, "What did the text reveal about the patriarchy and marginalization? How do we reclaim Delilah's sense of worth because she has been given a bad name as a harlot, conniver, and the devil's gateway?" This exercise allowed the participants to analyze the scripture in such a way that biblical women that have been vilified should be reimagined based upon a womanist

interpretive lens. A common theme throughout the session from the participants was that the review of the story of Samson and Delilah was helpful and eye opening.

Following the presentation, the facilitator led a question-and-answer period about Womanist theology and the tenets of womanism. The session ended with a reminder to complete the journal entries for immediate presentation. I also thanked the participants for their continued commitment to the program and offered the closing prayer.

Week Four: Oppression, Privilege, and Spiritual Malpractice

The fourth session was held on Thursday, October 5, 2023, via Zoom. The session began at 6 p.m. and lasted approximately ninety-six minutes. Six women attended the session with one student absent due to her husband's illness. The session opened in prayer and the introduction of the speaker, Dr. Jamie Eaddy Chism, who has a Doctor of Ministry degree with a focus on oppression of women in the Black church. The facilitator further introduced herself by naming her deceased grandmothers and how she carries their essence with her and the work that she does. This session mirrored the Historical Foundations chapter of this paper. The facilitator named the presentation, "Oppression, Privilege, and Spiritual Malpractice: A Psychosocial Approach to Understanding and Combating Gender Micro Aggression in the Black Church."

The facilitator began the session by asking participants to define oppression, privilege, and microaggression. One participant defined oppression as "something subtle like addressing women as sister or speaker rather than her title as reverend or pastor. It is subtle so it doesn't sound condescending." The facilitator continued by introducing the participants to Black preaching women of the nineteenth century. These preaching

women, Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw and Julie Foote — all of whom navigated insurmountable odds involving patriarchy, sexism, and racism. She emphasized that the women were not only preachers but activists. The facilitator recommended participants read the book, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century (Religion in North America)* by William L. Andrews. This book showcases sermons by Lee, Elaw, and Foote, and their biographies.

Dr. Chism's quote, "If your fight for liberation stops once you gain your freedom, it was not liberation you were after. It was privilege," piqued the participants' interests and led to much discussion. One participant asked the presenter to repeat the quote and remarked how powerful and empowering the words were for her. Another participant remarked how other women in the church use their perceived privilege to oppress women. Lastly, one woman stated, "I have endured a lot of this. I had one woman to get up at my pastor's wife anniversary and said that God didn't call me to preach and that there was no such thing as a co-pastor." Upon hearing this statement, at least one woman audibly gasped and others' facial expressions showed disdain at not only the statement but the occasion on which the statement was made.

The presentation ended with a question-and-answer period. One participant asked the facilitator to provide strategies for combatting patriarchal spaces that do not affirm preaching women. The facilitator made space for other participants to share their views on the question. Most views centered on hosting events on women and choosing not to attend events that knowingly uphold patriarchal views regarding women in ministry and withholding funds. Meanwhile, by the feedback and full participation from the women,

this week's session appeared to be a success. The night ended with prayer and encouragement to complete their weekly journal entries.

Week Five: A Sociological Case for Preaching Women

The fifth session was held on Thursday, October 12, 2023. This session was aligned with the Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter in this doctoral thesis. Dr. Cassandra Gould, the presenter, named the session, "A Sociological Case for Preaching Women: Gender, Power & the Pulpit." Seven women attended the session that lasted 103 minutes. The facilitator was chosen because of her social justice work and advocacy to dismantle systems that discriminate against women. I opened the session with prayer and then introduced the speaker, who further introduced herself by telling stories about her mother, grandmother, and daughter.

Dr. Gould defined Social Conflict Theory using the definition I provided in the Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter of this thesis. She undergirded the presentation with real-life inequities that impact women throughout their lives. One such example is unequal pay between women and men. The impact at times results in women being in tension with each other as institutions, including the church, makes room for only one woman in a space where men are dominant. The presenter asked the participants had anyone ever been the "one acceptable woman." One participant, a pastor's wife, stated, "I haven't been the woman, but I tell people for the most part our pastors are men, and we have to realize that is why they think the way they do. I have a voice, and I tell my pastor when he's putting together a committee or something to not leave the women out. Don't just pick a bunch of men. Thank God sometimes, he listens."

Dr. Gould fostered engagement through an exercise that asked the women, as children growing up in church, what they saw, heard, learned/believed, and said about women and their roles in the church. Some of the answers included the following:

- “I saw all men in leadership positions such as deacons, trustees, and preachers. I saw women on the usher board, as kitchen workers, and Sunday school teachers.”

“I heard women need to know their place. Women are evangelists and missionaries, not preachers. I heard that men are the head and women are to submit.”

- “I learned and believed that women couldn’t be pastors and boisterous women were ridiculed.”

“I said that God couldn’t have called me because I’m a loudmouth and no one would listen. I said most of my problems are with women bosses. I said I don’t like insecure women that don’t stand on their own two feet.”

- “I saw only the preacher did the baptizing, never the woman. It was always the male pastor.”

“When women tried to do things in the church, I heard the men say, ‘Them women doing too much.’”

“I learned and believed women should be quiet. Whatever the patriarchy did, that was just how it was.”

“Before I knew better and learned the scriptures, I said nothing and that was the sad part. I said nothing.”

The final portion of the session centered on social movements that changed society because of disruptors who went against the status quo. The presenter emphasized that conflict is involved in shifting power, and within the church women must join forces to advocate for change and not only systems to cause them to fight each other. Regarding conflict, one participant said, “Some people may find this hard to believe, but I don’t like conflict. So sometimes, I will be quiet about something in the church because I don’t want to engage in conflict. I’m thankful for the statement, ‘conflict isn’t bad but unresolved conflict is bad.’ Change doesn’t come until there is an uprising. This touched me. You got to speak up if things are going to change. Things will continue because I didn’t speak up. I didn’t want to engage in conflict.”

Meanwhile, the session ended with thanking Dr. Gould for her presentation, reminding the women of their journals, providing an overview of the final week that will include individual interviews, and offering a closing prayer.

Week Six: Review of Sessions One - Five

Prior to the start to the session, each woman was invited to schedule a time for her individual interview. I provided my Calendly online scheduler that provided my availability on October 17-18. My goal was to have all interviews done before the start of the final session on October 19. All interviews except one were completed within the allotted timeframe. One participant could not meet the deadline due to death in her family. She also did not attend the final session. Six women attended the final session of the program. The session lasted forty minutes; this did not include the thirty-minute individual sessions.

I began the session with prayer and my expressions of gratitude to the women who remained committed to the project and six-week program. I also reviewed the importance of the data and how it will be used in the overall dissertation's future endeavors relating to the topics discussed. Briefly, I reviewed each week and allowed the participants to share information they learned during the week that positively or negatively impacted them. Following are their responses:

- Week One: The State of Preaching Women

“Confidence in the past is one thing that had a damper on me. If you don't have the confidence and the support to feel you have a voice, it causes you to doubt yourself. I have planted in my heart and head to have confidence.”

- Week Two: Should Women Be Silent in the Church?

“I have challenged men who claimed to be experts on why they claim women have to be silent. You just can't read the surface of the text. You have to take it apart. If you challenge someone, you have to know what you are talking about, so you do not come off defensive. You have to have the necessary ammunition to challenge something that you know is not right.”

- Week Three: Who Told You That?

“What hit me the most is when I heard the word womanish; it made me think negatively based upon what I grew up learning that being womanish was something bad. Until I looked at Alice Walker's definition, I thought of it in negative terms. I realized it wasn't negative at all.”

- Week Four What Can History Teach Us?

“We have to watch our language and the microaggressions. We also use words

that insult us. Like we always refer to the males as reverend, but the female preacher as sister. We fall into that category when we don't want to because that's the way that it's always used."

- Week 5: Gender, Power, & the Pulpit

"When it comes to women being pit against each other, I hadn't seen it like that before. There are some things in scripture that even the way they are set up aids in the patriarchal system. When we use our voices in church, things change. We have to stand up and disrupt some things."

Following the review of the weeks and every participant having an opportunity to speak, I once again thanked the participants for their commitment to the process. I shared with the women that to show my gratitude for their participation each woman would receive a gift of appreciation. I also asked if they would find value continuing as a community of support through a private Facebook group. Each woman affirmed they would be open to such a virtual community. One participant shared that she would be a panelist in a discussion on women in ministry and that what she had learned through these six weeks will help guide her discussion. The final session ended with me reminding participants of the deadline to submit their journals and completed post-survey questionnaire and electronic journals. The closing prayer included blessings on each of the women as they continue in their God-ordained assignment.

Summary of Learning

Qualitative analysis was the preferred methodology used to capture data needed to assess the impact and effectiveness of this project. The means of data collection was

personal interviews, journal writings, and pre- and post-project surveys. All data was captured in a timely manner without any hinderances or obstacles. The training sessions were held for six weeks, each ranging up to two hours. Four qualified women, each who holds a Doctor of Ministry degree, were chosen to facilitate the sessions based upon their expertise in a professional field. As the researcher, I served as the fifth presenter. Each presenter is ordained clergy with a combined total of more than fifty years in ministry.

The first method used to capture data was the pre-project survey that was emailed as a fillable PDF. The pre-project survey was completed before the start of the first session. The second method used was an electronic journal that was emailed to participants once they committed to participate by returning the Informed Consent form. The participating women were instructed to complete their journal entries weekly. The third method included individual interviews with each participant and was conducted before the start of the final session. Each participant scheduled a time using the researcher's electronic scheduler. Throughout the six weeks, the participants were reminded that all written, audio, and video documentation would be confidential and discarded after a period of five years. Concerning the individual interviews, each participant shared how much she felt privileged to participate in the program and expressed hope that the program would continue to include additional women. The post-project survey was emailed to participants following the last session. I asked participants to return the document within two days. All post-project surveys were returned within the stated deadline.

An analysis of the pre- and post-project surveys indicates participants' understanding of topics increased. For example, Question 1 asked participants to define

patriarchy. In the pre-project survey, Participant #1 answered, “in a society where male authority is dominant.” In the post-project survey, she answered, “a system or government that is totally defined and led by men and women are treated as second or no class.” Participant #12, in the pre-project survey defined patriarchy as “a male-dominated and male-led system that can often be oppressive to women in its beliefs, practices and opportunities.” In the post-project survey, Participant #12 defined patriarchy as “a social construct or male-dominated system that is oppressive to women in its beliefs, practices, and opportunities. It determines the rules, norms, and ideologies of a society with respect to every aspect (culture, religion, etc.). Those operating with a patriarchal mindset will do anything to maintain their power. It shows up in the workplace, the home, and in the church.” The participants shared a common definition of patriarchy, wherein male domination over women was a recurring theme in their responses.

Another indication of an increase in learning shows up in the way participants answered Question 2, which asked women to define liberation. Participant #1022, in the pre-project survey, defined liberation as “being set free from the system or things that have you bound.” In the post-project survey, Participant #1022 defined liberation as “the act of setting everyone free. Liberation is not true liberation until we are all free. It is not enough for me to be free if my sister or brother is still bound.” An analysis of answers in the pre- and post-project survey yielded a shift in the awareness and language around patriarchy and the ways it affects women and their religious practices and faith communities. All seven participants answered the questions in a similar way indicating liberation related to freedom.

Question 3 asked participants to “list the ways you have experienced patriarchy.”

Although the question did not limit the answers to the church, 85% of the participants answered they had experienced patriarchy in the church through male leadership limiting what they could do in church. One participant answered in the pre-project survey that she had never experienced patriarchy. However, in the post-project survey, she indicated she had experienced patriarchy on her job and in the church. Question 4 asked participants to “name historical or political acts or practices that oppress women in the home, church, community, or workplace.” Participants answered in a similar way indicating they were either not clear on the question or that they were not knowledgeable on key historical or political acts that oppressed women. However, the post-project survey showed a significant change in participants awareness of historical or political acts that oppressed women. Answers range from women’s right to vote to unequal treatment in the workplace.

Question 5 asked participants to “list activities or roles that are suitable for women in the church.” In the pre-project survey, participants indicated that women are commonly placed in roles that relate to serving. Such roles include ushers, children’s ministry leaders, kitchen help, or first lady. However, in the post-project survey, the women each answered in a similar manner that all roles are suitable for women. Interestingly, the participants were not against operating in serving roles if needed but that they are not limited to those roles.

The final question in the pre- and post-project survey asked participants to “name biblical texts that appear to prohibit women preachers and pastors.” Not surprising, eighty-five percent of the women included 1 Corinthians 14:34 in the pre-

project survey. However, in the post-project survey, the participants expanded their answers to include 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

An analysis of the electronic journals indicates a few women were more comfortable with using the journal for notetaking rather than reflecting on the information shared. A few of the women disclosed that they were not used to journaling their thoughts, feelings, or opinions on a subject. Thus, assessing their answers in some journals was difficult. Therefore, to elicit more reflective responses, I asked more open-ended questions of those women during the individual interviews.

Key findings emanating from the journal entries include the following:

- Regarding Week one, participant #1022 concluded, “The session increased my knowledge of how to navigate and survive the patriarchal system.” Another woman, participant #12, wrote, “Dr. Moss, what a fireball and an inspiration!!! What a great start to this great project! I am so glad to be a part of this forward movement.”
- Regarding Week two, in her journal, participant #2 wrote, “It is so sad to see people who consider themselves learned/educated and anointed be so close-minded. It also hurts that when you accept your call to preach as a woman, people leave, disassociate, or distance themselves! It is truly a lonely road! However, I had to accept the call because it was God who was calling! Can’t turn back. Won’t turn back! I heard His voice! I am reminded of the day! Oh, Lord!!!” Participant #7 wrote, “I felt a little frustration, sometimes a little anger to endure what’s said about women not being allowed in the pulpit in this week’s discussion. I feel a little sad because how could so many get it wrong.” Participant

#5 expressed this concern, “Will there ever be women solidarity in my hometown? Will they be eager to hear, learn and experience a new wind?”

- Regarding Week three, participant #5 expressed her feelings by stating, “I don’t know how I feel. You can only be mad, disappointed, angry, in disbelief and enraged for so long. What do you do to channel that negative energy and push through to a positive place? How do I control my emotions so that I can communicate with passion, zeal, and vigor? How do I get women to listen with an open mind?” Participant #12 wrote, “This week has challenged me to be more aware of the patriarchy and strategize ways to deconstruct, discourage, and dismantle it! Women are made to feel less than in the home, on the job and at church! It has to stop! This is hard, long road!!! OMG!”
- Of Week four’s session, participant #3 wrote, “I thank God for my grandmother and aunts who were strong in the word and taught me that a woman has a voice too. They didn’t let the men of the church stop them from doing what they thought was right.” Participant #12 noted that she was challenged with seeing and calling God, “Mother God.” She continued, “I am not totally opposed to it, but don’t see the need to say it. I realized that this may be the ideology of patriarchy even as I am opposed to the system of patriarchy. I ain’t ready.” Participant #1022 summed up week four by writing, “This session made me aware that I must watch the language that I use. I was made aware of some of the language that I use was actually reinforcing patriarchy. Although unintentional, I realize that I have to some extent been socialized to hold onto tradition that may reinforce the patriarchal system.” Participant #5 expressed anger that women “continue to be

treated as second best. I'm mad. I want change to happen now. Just like we had a Black president in our time, I want to see patriarchy and oppression gone in my lifetime."

- Week five's presentation resulted in participant #5 expressing feelings of sadness, disappointment, eagerness, hopefulness, change, developing, and empowering. She wrote, "This topic made me think of how often I have given away my power in my lifetime, sometimes unbeknownst, which is so concerning. My prayer is for more wisdom." Participant #1022 concluded, "This session encouraged me to stand up and speak up in areas where I normally would be silent. It encouraged me not to let truth be overtaken by tradition."

The third method of data collection was individual interviews, which allowed participants to respond to specific questions and articulate how they plan to apply the knowledge gained from the program. This data proved valuable in assessing the training's effectiveness in empowering women. Below are a few of the responses received:

- Participant 1: "Going forth, I want to create an atmosphere where those girls after me will have it better."
- Participant 3: "I want to take a stand, to speak up because I have a voice."
- Participant 5: "This training propelled me to start working with children but from a different vantage so I can teach children about women in the Bible so that girls will see themselves as God sees them."
- Participant 7: "I have increased my confidence. I pray for boldness and not to be deterred by the stoned faces in the congregation."

- Participant 11: “I want to encourage women to know they have a voice and that they don’t have to settle.”
- Participant 12: “I want to look at scripture that pertain to women more in depth. I want to especially look at those women who have a negative storyline. The session we had on Womanist Theology really pushed this home when we looked at how the story of Sampson and Delilah makes her look bad and it is passed down without us looking at the real story.”
- Participant 1022: “I want to look at scripture differently. I don’t go as deep as I need to. I need to ask more questions. I just usually go with what I’ve been taught. I want to look at the text differently.”

A common theme throughout the personal interviews was the women’s desire to use their voices to help liberate other women. Also, during the individual interview process, participants were asked, “On an average Sunday, are there more women or men in attendance?” Only one participant reported there are more men than women in her small congregation. Other women each reported at sixty percent of the congregation is women. Still, some answered “definitely more women,” or “for sure more women.” All participants shared they now readily see the disparity between the number of women in attendance and the number of women in churchwide leadership positions such as pastor and deacons.

My hypothesis states, “if participants engage in a six-week training program, then they will recognize patriarchal systems and practices that silence the voices of women called to preach and discover models to circumvent those obstacles.” An examination of the data, specifically the pre-and post-project surveys, indicates all participants not only

recognize patriarchy, but they also now have historical, biblical, and social models to navigate the systems that seek to silence women. Therefore, this six-week training program, “A Pathway to Liberation Empowerment Program,” affirms and proves the stated hypothesis.

Conclusion

The goal behind this doctoral dissertation is to give voice to women who have been silenced through patriarchal systems and practices based upon misinterpretation of biblical texts. Though Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana was the targeted area, this geographic location is by far not the only region filled with Black Baptist churches that espouse patriarchal rules that subjugate women. My thesis is that if Black women not only understand patriarchy and its effects on them, but they will also develop strategies to navigate obstacles. I sought to accomplish my goal of raising awareness through a six-week training program that centered on scriptures, theology, history, and sociology. I specifically chose Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana as a targeted area because it is the home of at least thirty Black Baptist churches that are primarily held by men. This targeted area was an ideal research site because of its historical richness and my personal ties to the Black Baptist church.

Because of the nature of the program, I chose to use the qualitative analysis method to gauge the effectiveness of the hypothesis and the program. Though three data collection methods, I was able to ascertain participants’ progress towards an increase of awareness. It is important to note that some participants gravitated to a specific collection method over the others. For example, one participant’s pre- and post-project survey did

not indicate any changes in understanding of the subject matter. However, this same participant in the individual interviews showed a significant increase in understanding of the topic of discussion. Therefore, as the researcher, I had to track overall progress rather than individual data captured methods.

Much to my surprise, the participants knew more about many of the topics than I anticipated. However, the training program provided them with more in-depth information and language that they could use to talk about the plight of preaching women and to share with other women how to navigate the obstacles. Also, much to my surprise, during the six-week training program, one Black Baptist church in my context for the first time in its 123-year history introduced a preaching woman to the congregation and invited her to the pulpit. The participants expressed joy upon hearing of the church's forward thinking.

All participants expressed gratitude for an invitation to participate in this research program. While one participant stated that she at first thought that six weeks was a long commitment, at the end of the program she expressed a need for more sessions. Another woman asked if the program would be offered again and how would additional women participate. All participants intimated that an ongoing support system for preaching women was needed in the contextual area. The six-weeks program appeared to have opened the women to share their stories and their struggles resulting in the women wanting more. At the conclusion of this phase in my doctoral journey, I thank God for each woman who committed to the process and remained to the end. I do not have the

words to express to each of the training facilitators who eagerly agreed to offer their expertise, experiences, and stories.

Finally, throughout this project I was reminded that I am resilient. My resiliency was on full display as I was not only involved in this project but also involved in several work projects that also demanded my full attention. Throughout this project, I experienced much exhaustion. Still, I forged ahead because of my commitment to the process and my passion for this project and its potential to help Black Baptist preaching women and the church. If I were to do this project again, I would recruit participants differently by utilizing social media. I purposely did not do so for this project because of its limited nature. However, including Facebook groups that feature preaching women may provide a more diverse group of participants with varying experiences but still meet the necessary criteria. Even so, this project is duplicable because of the research model and because the problems facing women in the targeted area are not limited to this area.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Investigator Name: Sherri L. Jackson
 Contact Information: sjackson1@united.edu
 Phone: (318) 308-2334

I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary, and I am conducting a study on the effects of patriarchy on women who have been called to preach in some Black Baptist churches..

You are invited because you have expressed interests in learning about how women who have been called to preach are discriminated against in some Black Baptist churches and how women can overcome obstacles that prevent them from fulfilling what they sense God is calling them to ministry and the pastorate..

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to attend a six-week training program weekly via Zoom, write your reflections from a weekly training session in a journal that will be provided to you, and engage in a personal interview with the researcher. Weekly training sessions will be no more than two hours.

All the participants must have consented to be in the study, and participants must be protected and treated fairly throughout the study. And for women who are pregnant or may become pregnant during the study, they must provide a doctor's note for their safety, since they are considered a protected class (i.e., vulnerable population) by the Federal Law.

Due to the nature of this study, there are spiritual and emotional risks associated with matters of faith, religious practices, and theological beliefs. Immediate risks may include feelings associated with guilt,, shame,, confusion,, and shattered assumptions. Also, associated previous trauma from lived experiences based upon topics of discussion may present emotional distress from feelings associated with low self-esteem,, inadequacies,, challenges to theological beliefs, and religious morals and values.

Long-term risks are not immediately known but may include lingering feelings of spiritual distress regarding new information that challenges theological beliefs, which, may lead one questioning the validity of her faith. Individuals who believe they are experiencing spiritual distress due to their participation are encouraged to seek out a board-certified chaplain or licensed mental health professional. A list of local board-certified chaplains and licensed mental health professionals will be provided.

The sole purpose of this study is to provide an increased awareness of the effects of patriarchy on women in Black Baptist churches. An opportunity for educational enrichment and personal growth are intangible but has the propensity to be life changing. Participation is voluntary and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You can also stop participating at any time. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your religious affiliations. If something makes you feel

uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please contact me directly in person, on the phone, or through electronic communication. My contact information is at the top of this consent form. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time.

I will be careful to keep your information confidential, and we will ask you and all the focus group members to keep the discussion confidential as well. There is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. The conversations and the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed for purposes of this study only. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept private. I will be the only one with access to your information. The files will be encrypted, and password protected. Your names will not be used on any documents that you will submit to me. Sessions conducted via Zoom will be recorded.

Information contained in this consent form is provided to you so that you may make an informed decision about your participation. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact me. If you can agree to the terms, please sign the form electronically and return to me via email sjackson1@united.edu by the start of the first training session, September 14, 2023..

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to
Participate in the Project/Study

Date Signed

APPENDIX B

WELCOME LETTER



August 27, 2023

Greetings Women of Faith:

I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. I am conducting a six-week research study based upon my doctoral dissertation, “Preaching Women Matter: Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That Affirm Preaching Women in Alexandria, Louisiana & Beyond.” After successfully passing my Candidacy Review (March 22, 2023) the Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted me permission to implement my final project.

In this regard, you are invited to participate in my research study as potential participants with an expressed interest in this research. The goal of the six-week program, “A Pathway to Liberation Empowerment Program,” is to raise participants’ awareness of patriarchal systems and practices that silence the voices of women called to preach and discover models to circumvent those obstacles. Participation in this study is limited to Black women, who attend Black Baptist churches. Women must be eighteen years of age or older, may be called to preach, or women who have influence or leadership positions within their local church. Women who are pregnant or become pregnant during this research period may do so with a written statement from her doctor stating she is under medical care and that the doctor has no objection to her participation in the study. If needed, study details will be provided to the woman for her doctor to review.

For my action research project, I have chosen to host Empowerment Sessions weekly on Thursday beginning, September 14, 2023, through October 19, 2023. Each session will be from 6 p.m. CST to 7:30 p.m. CST. Each session will be held in a private Zoom room with women participants only. Each participant should be alone in a secure area to maintain privacy and confidentiality of all participants.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. The information and data collected from you will be used solely for the purpose of this doctoral study to fulfill degree requirements and will not be shared or distributed beyond the scope of the study. No identifiable information will be included in the final project. Data will be analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the project and reported in the final project published research document.

Attached to this written invitation letter is an informed consent form that you will need to sign and return to me no later than the first project module on Thursday, September 14, 2023, if you choose to participant. Signing the informed consent form means that you have read the information fully or had it read to you and that you want to participant in the study. If you do not want to participate in the study, do not sign this form. Again, your participation is voluntary. Signing the consent form means that you have been informed about this study, the purpose of this study, and expectations from your participation.

In closing, I look forward to your continued support in this final stage of my doctoral program. If you would like more information or have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (318) 308-2334 or by email at sjackson1@united.edu

In God's Service

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sherri L. Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S' and a long, sweeping underline.

Reverend Sherri L. Jackson
Candidate for the Doctor of Ministry Degree, Class of 2024
Preaching and Leadership Development in the 21st Century
Dr. Lee E. Fields Jr., Mentor

APPENDIX C
PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

**Preaching Women Matter:
Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That
Affirm Preaching Women in
Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana
& Beyond
Pre-Project Survey**

Question 1: How do you define patriarchy?

Question 2: How do you define liberation?

Question 3: List ways you have experienced patriarchy.

**Preaching Women Matter:
Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That
Affirm Preaching Women in
Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana
& Beyond
Pre-Project Survey**

Question 4: Name historical or political acts or practices that oppress women in th home, church, community or workplace.

Question 5: List activities or roles that are suitable for women in the church.

Question 6: Name biblical texts that appear to prohibt women preachers and pastors.

APPENDIX D
POST-PROJECT SURVEYS

**Preaching Women Matter:
Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That
Affirm Preaching Women in
Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana
& Beyond
Post-Project Survey**

Question 1: How do you define patriarchy?

Question 2: How do you define liberation?

Question 3: List ways you have experienced patriarchy.

**Preaching Women Matter:
Overcoming Patriarchy and Establishing Models That
Affirm Preaching Women in
Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana
& Beyond
Post-Project Survey**

Question 4: Name historical or political acts or practices that oppress women in th home, church, community or workplace.

Question 5: List activities or roles that are suitable for women in the church.

Question 6: Name biblical texts that appear to prohibt women preachers and pastors.

APPENDIX E
JOURNAL COVER

MY VOICE MATTERS

A Journal Companion to Rev. Sherri L. Jackson's Doctoral Research Project

Preaching Women Matter: Overcoming Patriarchy
and Establishing Models That Affirm Preaching Women in
Southeast Alexandria, Louisiana & Beyond



My Feelings, Emotions, Thoughts

Participant # ____

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